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Thursday, 26 April 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Meza-Cuadra/Mr. Tenya	(Peru)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Dah
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Bahrain, Botswana, Brazil, Cuba, Egypt, Iceland, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Malaysia, Maldives, Malta, Morocco, Namibia, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Turkey, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Viet Nam to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I also invite the following individuals to participate in this meeting: His Excellency Mr. João Pedro Vale de Almeida, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations; His Excellency Mr. Maged Abdelfattah Abdelaziz, Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States to the United Nations; and Her Excellency Mrs. María Rubiales de Chamorro, Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: Two weeks ago, the Secretary-General addressed the Security Council on the crisis in the Middle East and the threats to international peace and security (see S/PV.8231). He spoke of a region that is plagued by sectarian divisions, by imploding States and exploding extremist groups; a region in which anger and frustration quickly turn to terror, violence and radicalism; a region where the battle between moderation and radicalism is the battle for the future of millions of people. What happens in the Middle East today has immediate implications for the rest of the world.

Outside interference is transforming domestic conflicts into regional wars. In Syria, we see confrontations between several national armies, their proxies, various armed opposition groups, militias, foreign fighters and multiple terrorist organizations. Humanitarian crises are escalating and spreading across borders. In Yemen, we are witnessing the worst humanitarian disaster of our time. Old wounds continue to bleed and deepen as we speak, risking the outbreak of another war. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict continues with no prospect of a political resolution, and Gaza is about to explode. Gross violations of international law, including human rights law and humanitarian law, have become the hallmark of the region.

Today, the risk of miscalculation grows, increasing the danger of a wider conflagration as violence spills across borders. In that highly charged and dangerous environment, whether in Syria, Yemen or Gaza, one word becomes critical. It is de-escalation — de-escalation of the dangerous military buildup; de-escalation of the inflammatory and provocative political rhetoric. Everyone in the Middle East needs to step back from the brink. There is no military solution to the conflicts of the region.

Amid these complex conditions, my counterparts in the region and I regularly emphasize in our briefings to the Council the rapidly shifting regional dynamics. The United Nations is working tirelessly to prevent further deterioration, while supporting national political processes region-wide. We in the field need the international community to continue supporting multilateral mechanisms promoting security, stability and development in the region. We see the need for

more multilateralism that blends humanitarian and development interventions with preventive diplomacy and crisis management.

As stated by the Secretary-General, the changing nature of conflict means that prevention should be at the centre of our efforts. It is most certainly needed when dealing with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Although the urgency of the grave situations in Syria, Yemen and elsewhere has understandably focused international attention, Palestine remains a central part of the regional quagmire. Until the occupation ends and a two-State solution is achieved through meaningful negotiations based on relevant United Nations resolutions, the conflict will remain one of the key drivers of extremism and a persistent threat to regional stability.

Gaza is coming apart as we speak. It is coming apart under the pressure of an explosive combination of negative humanitarian, security and political factors. If another conflict between Hamas and Israel were to erupt, it would have devastating consequences for Palestinians in Gaza. It could undermine the relative stability of the West Bank and have repercussions for Israel and the region. I say this with a heavy heart and in the hope that all of us will do our utmost, in the spirit of preventive diplomacy.

For the past four weeks, tens of thousands of Palestinians in Gaza have converged on the border with Israel in the context of the Great March of Return protests. Demonstrations are expected to continue and culminate around 15 May, and could spread to the West Bank and beyond. Since 30 March, during these demonstrations 35 Palestinians have been killed and a large number have been injured by Israeli security forces. No Israeli casualties have been reported.

There has also been an increasing number of dangerous incidents at the fence, including the planting of improvised explosive devices — at least one of which detonated — the throwing of Molotov cocktails and attempts to breach the fence. Israel has accused Hamas, Islamic Jihad and other militants of using the protests, women, children and the elderly as a cover to infiltrate Israel and to commit terrorist attacks. As these protests continue, tension and the potential for serious incidents and further casualties will increase.

I have engaged in an intense effort with all sides to reduce the risks of friction and welcome efforts, particularly those of Egypt and others, to the same effect. Israel must calibrate its use of force and minimize the use of live fire. Lethal force should be used only as a last resort. Hamas and the leaders of the demonstrations must keep protestors away from the Gaza fence and prevent all violent actions and provocations. The Secretary-General has been vocal in reiterating these messages and calling for restraint, and has repeatedly called for all incidents to be investigated.

Children, who should be particularly protected, are at grave risk. Sadly, to date we have witnessed at least four who have been shot dead by Israeli live fire. I take this opportunity to reiterate in the strongest possible terms that civilians, particularly children, must not be intentionally put in danger or targeted in any way. Everyone must ensure that civilians are able to exercise their right to demonstrate peacefully. I welcome recent reports that the Israel Defense Forces have established a team to examine the use of force during the current protests, including all incidents of fatal shooting, and reiterate the importance of conducting an independent investigation for results to be credible.

In other incidents, two Hamas militants were shot dead on 30 March in an exchange of fire near Gaza's fence, and five rockets and mortars were fired towards Israel in the past month. On 12 April, one person was killed by an Israeli air strike after a group of Palestinian militants targeted an Israeli aircraft with machine gun fire. At least three additional militants were killed by the Israeli security forces in separate incidents. On 15 April, Israel announced that it had sealed the fifth Hamas tunnel in the past six months leading from Gaza into its territory. The Israeli security forces also foiled an attempt in the West Bank to smuggle 10 pipe bombs that were reportedly intended for an attack on Israel's Independence Day.

As I have said repeatedly, all militant activity in Gaza, including the digging of tunnels and the firing of rockets, must cease. It threatens the lives of Israelis and Palestinians alike, increases the risk of a new escalation of hostilities, undermines calls for lifting the closures, and ultimately damages the prospects for peace. I call on all Member States to join the United Nations in condemning such actions.

On top of the security risks escalating in Gaza, the humanitarian situation continues to rapidly deteriorate. Starting in March 2017 and without prior notice, the Palestinian Authority reduced the salary benefits of thousands of public sector employees in the Strip

by over 30 per cent. One year later, in March 2018 it suspended the payment of salaries to some 20,000 civil servants in Gaza. The impact of this decision has been devastating. Gaza's already faltering public service will move further towards a total collapse. Hospitals and clinics, schools, water and wastewater treatment facilities, garbage collection, transportation and other critical services will be critically impacted. I have engaged with the Palestinian Authority on the destructive impact of such decisions, which pressure ordinary families that are already struggling to make ends meet. That is why I call on the Palestinian Government to resume the payment of public-sector salaries in Gaza without delay.

We must immediately deal with the humanitarian crisis that is unfolding. Israel must relax movement and access restrictions on Gaza to enable the economy to recover, with due consideration for its legitimate security concerns. In this context, I take note of the decision to increase the fishing zone from six to nine nautical miles, and urge that the zone be extended further and on a permanent basis. I also note our continuing engagement with Israel and the Palestinian Authority on the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism.

I want to assure the Council that the United Nations is working intensely with partners to prioritize energy and water initiatives discussed in the format of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians, as well as in our donor meetings in Cairo and Washington, D.C. The long-term goal of increasing energy supply must be pursued, alongside immediate and short-term projects in the Gaza Strip.

Compounding the deteriorating humanitarian and security situation in Gaza are the stalled efforts to restore Palestinian Authority control over the Strip. Despite the best efforts of Egypt, the implementation of the Cairo agreement has come to a halt. I urge all Palestinian factions to engage with Egypt and redouble their efforts to enable the legitimate Palestinian Government to be fully empowered in Gaza. The combination of the security, development and humanitarian deterioration that we are seeing Gaza, coupled with the political impasse, makes the Strip a powder-keg.

Notwithstanding the tragic developments in the rest of the region, we must do everything possible to prevent another war in Gaza. It is imperative that the international community and the Security Council support the efforts of the United Nations and key stakeholders to address the security, humanitarian and political challenges that I have outlined. The tragic events in Gaza have reinforced the growing risks of implosion and explosion, with potentially grave consequences elsewhere in the region. Palestine refugee camps in the occupied Palestinian territory, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria are highly vulnerable.

In this context, the situation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is particularly worrying. Even with the welcome pledges of some $100 million last month in Rome, the recent $50-million pledged by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, respectively, and the $10-million contribution just announced by Japan, UNRWA operations are funded only into the summer.

Shutting down or reducing services at this critical time would further destabilize the region. The ability of half a million Palestinian refugee students across the Middle East to start the new school year, must be protected. Just in Gaza, UNRWA serves as a lifeline for more than 1 million people — half the population — who are at risk of losing access to health services, education and food. Without those services, we should anticipate a dramatic increase in social unrest, poverty, hunger and psychosocial problems, not only in Gaza but across the region. I again appeal to Member States to ensure funding for UNRWA.

Turning briefly to the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, there have been no settlement plans approved or tenders issued in the reporting period. However, settlement construction and the demolition of Palestinian-owned structures in Area C have continued. The United Nations considers all settlement activities illegal under international law and an obstacle to peace.

According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, in Area C of the West Bank 35 structures were demolished, including a school in the Hebron community of Khirbet Zanuta. The only school of the Al-Muntar Bedouin community is also at risk of being demolished. Meanwhile, attacks against Palestinians and the vandalism of property are also increasing. On 13 April a mosque in the West Bank was badly damaged in another apparent hate crime and arson attack.

Turning to Lebanon, allow me to note that preparations for the first parliamentary elections in nearly a decade continue on track. In Lebanon, the

United Nations engages with stakeholders in order to ensure that credible and inclusive elections will be followed by the swift formation of a Government. That is important in order to safeguard the country's stability and to sustain the positive momentum of the recent Rome II and CEDRE conferences. The Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon remains engaged with regional stakeholders to defuse tensions and to prevent the risk of conflict spilling over, including into Lebanon.

The situation in southern Lebanon and along the Blue Line remains calm but tense. South of the Blue Line, Israel proceeded with construction in several locations outside the Lebanese reservation areas. On 8 and 12 April, tension increased, with Lebanese demonstrations north of the Blue Line in the vicinity of the works. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon has maintained close liaison with the parties, including at the tripartite level, to prevent misunderstandings and miscalculations.

I would like to conclude with some brief reflections on the situation in Gaza, the peace process and the regional impact. What is happening in Gaza today is an injustice that no man, woman or child should have to endure. The deplorable living conditions, the consequences of the continued suffocating closures and the control of Hamas and the increasing risk that Gaza could trigger a new conflict are building up. People should not be destined to spend their lives surrounded by borders that they are forbidden to cross or waters that they are forbidden to navigate. They should not be destined to live under the control of Hamas, which invests in military activities at the expense of the population.

I firmly believe that there is a way out. The challenges are political and man-made and therefore resolvable if all sides firmly commit to supporting practical solutions that can be implemented quickly, effectively and sustainably.

However, Gaza is only part of the story. We must also step up our efforts to support the parties in advancing a sustainable Israeli-Palestinian peace on the basis of the two-State solution. The prospects for peace are slipping further and further away, emboldening extremists and deepening polarization and mistrust on all sides. With tensions mounting across the region, the lack of progress should worry us all. The fires of the Middle East continue to expand and shift. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains a perpetual source of oxygen for militants and radicals across the region.

Establishing a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the conflict would eliminate a chronic source of instability and violence from the region. The United Nations will continue to make every effort in the pursuit of that objective.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): On behalf of the State of Palestine, I congratulate Peru on its presidency of the Security Council and on its skilled leadership of the Council at this critical time.

Today, I must also express sincere condolences to the Council and to the Permanent Mission, Government and people of Côte d'Ivoire, in particular, on the passing of our dear colleague, Ambassador Bernard Tanoh-Boutchoue. May he rest in eternal peace. He was truly a kind and genuine diplomat. He will be greatly missed.

We thank Special Coordinator Nikolay Mladenov for his briefing. We express our appreciation for the ongoing efforts of the Secretary-General and Mr. Mladenov, including the recent statements made in line with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. While such statements should be considered standard, we are obliged to recognize them in view of the constant harassment and intimidation to which the United Nations and its representatives are exposed every time they risk taking a public, principled stand on our issue, as opposed to the artificial and so-called balanced stand that Israel bullies States into adopting, despite the complete lack of symmetry in the abnormal and unjust situation.

Today, that extremely abnormal and unjust situation is most starkly exemplified by the dire situation in the Gaza Strip, where for more than a decade 2 million Palestinians, the majority of whom are refugees, have been subjected to an illegal Israeli land, sea and air blockade. That has vastly compounded the misery and suffering inflicted on the Palestinian people by the five decades of Israeli military occupation since 1967 and the seven decades of dispossession and denial of their right to return to their homes and ancestral lands since their ruthless uprooting in the Nakba of 1948.

Yet, as in all other areas of occupied Palestine and in exile in the refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, our people in Gaza have remained more than patient. Despite the repeated upheavals, assaults, crises, deep deprivation and marginalization, they have remained steadfast, as is also reflected at this time in the perseverance of the Palestinian refugees in Syria, who face the extreme hardships and dangers of war. That resilient and hopeful spirit is at the heart of the Great March of Return, launched by Palestinians in Gaza on 30 March, Land Day, and of the protests carried out since then.

Contrary to Israeli propaganda, the protests have been peaceful demonstrations by unarmed and defenceless Palestinian civilians calling for their rights, including to return, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III), and to self-determination, and demanding an end to the Israeli blockade that has collectively punished, impoverished and disfigured the entire society. Exercising their right to peaceful assembly, those men, women and young people are protesting an oppression that can no longer be endured, pleading for their voices to be heard.

The Palestinian people live under the longest military occupation and most protracted refugee crisis in modern history. They endure constant displacement, colonization and demonization, all aimed at their denial. Against that backdrop, the restraint should be seen as extraordinary and such protests as a natural response to the illegal and cruel occupation. Let us all here agree that it is not a benign occupation. Even deeming it a belligerent occupation is an understatement.

Why is the occupying Power therefore so surprised that a people would rise up to demand its dignity and freedom? Why is it so outrageous that a people would use all possible peaceful means to bring an end to its persecution? Why have Israeli officials commanded their military forces to fire at peaceful protesters? Why are civilians, including children, being targeted with live ammunition in a blatant shoot-to-kill-and-maim pattern, with at least 41 Palestinians killed by the occupying forces and more than 5,000 injured, many permanently disabled by the severity of their injuries, since the protests began?

Where else in the world could an entire civilian population, over half of them children, be imprisoned and designated as a target, as is being done by Israeli War Minister Avigdor Lieberman? Minister Lieberman has openly declared that "there are no innocent civilians in Gaza", meaning that the 2 million inhabitants of Gaza are not innocent and a legitimate target. This same Minister also declared, in referring to video footage of an Israeli soldier deliberately shooting a Palestinian man, that "the sniper deserves a promotion, whereas the cameraman deserves a demotion". Such wilful targeting of civilians is terrorism in every sense of the word. It is a grave breach of international humanitarian, human rights and criminal law and violates the obligation to protect civilians.

The international community must demand answers from Israel. The Security Council's failure to address this situation cannot be justified. The Council must speak with one voice to condemn these crimes, insist on their cessation, including a full lifting of the blockade, demand an investigation and ensure protection for the Palestinian people based on international law.

We welcome the calls of the Secretary-General and other leaders for an independent, transparent investigation of the recent killings of Palestinian civilians by Israeli occupying forces and urge its swift launching via an international mechanism that will ensure a legitimate investigation and not another whitewash. But an investigation is not an end in itself; rather, it must be part of broader efforts to ensure accountability, end this entire travesty of justice and make peace. In this regard, we thank the 14 members of the Security Council that tried in the first and second weeks, through the efforts of our brothers in the delegation of Kuwait, to endorse the Secretary-General's call for an independent and transparent investigation. We all, unfortunately, know the reason why such an investigation will not take place and why the statement to the press was not endorsed.

The truth, however, is that Israel does not want peace. Listen to official Israeli statements, including the statement made by the Israeli representative in this Chamber, who will no doubt again attack our delegation for standing up for our rights and renew Israel's attempt to shame Security Council members for daring to call for respect of the Charter and United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016). In this regard, it is totally illogical and absurd to reward Israel's illegal behaviour with support for its brazen candidacy to the Security Council, a body it has never respected and constantly mocks, and whose credibility it undermines. It is audacious for the Israelis to seek to

be a member of a club that they despise and disrespect, and whose resolutions they refuse to implement.

If Israel had even remotely ever sought peace — as opposed to using peace talks as a cover for its continued land grab and de facto annexation schemes — then we would not be in the dire situation we are in today. If Israel truly sought peace, we would not be witness to the brutal murders of young Palestinian boys, such as Mohammed Ayyoub, age 15, who was savagely shot in the head and killed by an Israeli soldier while peacefully protesting with other civilians at the Gaza border; or the killing of young photojournalist Yaser Murtaja, age 30, shot while covering the protests, despite wearing clearly marked press gear, ending his life and his dream to travel out of Gaza one day, a dream repeatedly denied by the Israeli blockade; or the killing of a young deaf Palestinian, Tahrir Mahmoud Wahba, age 18, who was shot by an Israeli soldier during the 13 April protests and died this week of his wounds; or the killing of so many other Palestinians in recent weeks and the critical conditions of at least 100 persons suffering life-threatening injuries caused by the deadly weaponry and munitions used against them by the occupying forces.

Just like the thousands before them, they have been killed for being Palestinians — for being non-Jews — in an ongoing campaign of ethnic cleansing, colonization and dehumanization of the Palestinian people. In this context, we must refer to a recent declaration by the so-called Justice Minister of Israel, who stated that "there is a place to maintain a Jewish majority even at the price of violation of rights".

On the eve of the seventieth anniversary of the Nakba, it is a tragic fact that our Nakba continues, with destructive and malicious crimes being perpetrated against our people with absolute impunity. Before the eyes of the world, young innocents are brutally murdered; the lives of millions of families are destroyed; our land is stolen and fragmented by Israeli settlements and a medieval wall; the heart of our country, Jerusalem, has been seized and isolated, and the sanctity and historical status of its holy sites violated; our people in Gaza are inhumanely besieged and blockaded; Israeli settlers ruthlessly terrorize Palestinian civilians; and thousands of Palestinians, including 350 children, 62 women and six parliamentarians, continue to be imprisoned, detained and tortured for rejecting this illegal occupation and its gross violation of their rights.

All of the foregoing is being committed deliberately, in grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention and in violation of the Charter and resolutions of the United Nations and all human rights instruments to which Israel is a signatory and claims to respect, which amounts to war crimes and crimes against humanity. And yet, despite all of this, the Palestinian people and leadership remain committed to the pursuit of a just and peaceful solution. We also continue to seek, despite all the obstacles, the genuine resolution and reconciliation so essential for fulfilling our national aspirations.

That is why President Mahmoud Abbas came before the Security Council on 20 February, with due respect for its authority (see S/PV.8183). We have again made an appeal for our rights and extended our hand in peace. This peace plan, centred on the established international terms of reference and parameters for a peaceful solution, in line with relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative, is a serious attempt to bring the situation back from the brink.

We are grateful for the support given to this plan, including by Security Council members and other States, as well as by the recent League of Arab States summit — the Jerusalem Summit, held in Saudi Arabia — and by the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. We appeal today for efforts to be made to back this plan and mobilize for its implementation.

But no matter how many times we reaffirm our commitment to peace, no matter the efforts exerted over years of negotiations and the historic compromises made to that end, Israel continues to respond with aggression and contempt. At every juncture, the Israeli Government has obstructed peace efforts and ignored the international community's will, choosing instead to escalate violence, incitement and hateful rhetoric against our people, alongside its settlement and annexation policies, destroying the two-State solution on the 1967 borders and the potential for peace.

To this, we must say that peace cannot be realized in the absence of respect for international law, the Charter of the United Nations and its resolutions; nor can it be realized absent the fulfilment of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, foremost among them the right to self-determination, a right that no one on this Earth would willingly forsake. Plans that disregard those fundamentals will never bring peace.

That is why the United States decision on Jerusalem and the impending transfer of its embassy, in violation of Security Council resolutions, have so negatively impacted the chances for resuming peace talks. As with other key components, there can be no just and sustainable solution without Jerusalem. East Jerusalem remains an integral part of the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967 and is the capital of the State of Palestine, regardless of the passage of time and of Israel's measures aimed at forcibly and illegally altering the city's legal status, character and demographics.

It is therefore extremely regrettable that, instead of rejecting Israel's illegal actions, a few States are emboldening its impunity. Recent decisions, including by Guatemala, mirroring the United States decision and flouting relevant resolutions — including resolutions 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016), which reaffirms Jerusalem's status as occupied and calls on all States to distinguish between Israel and the territory occupied since 1967 — evoke complicity with Israel's violations and should be rescinded immediately.

No action taken by Israel or any other State can negate the applicability of international law to this situation, including in regard to the prohibition of acquisition of territory by force. Such actions have zero legal effect and cannot negate Palestinian rights or legitimate national aspirations. We stand firmly in our conviction, and will continue using all peaceful, diplomatic and legal means to protect our people, uphold their rights and protect our land.

We reiterate our call on the international community to also remain resolute in rejecting Israel's illegal policies and practices. All States must demand a complete halt to and disassociate themselves from such violations in order to bring an end to the occupation and enable the realization of justice and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including to freedom and independence.

Moreover, we urge the international community to maintain its solidarity with and support to the Palestinian people. Responsible humanitarian action, including support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), has been a lifeline over the decades. At this moment of the heightened vulnerability we are witnessing — particularly these days — in Gaza and in the light of the unprecedented financial crisis faced by UNRWA, we appeal for enhanced support to ensure the Agency's vital humanitarian, development and protection assistance to our refugees and its crucial contribution to regional stability.

In closing, we reiterate our call on the Security Council to act now, in line with its Charter duties, to de-escalate this dangerous situation, to deter the occupying Power's crimes, to prevent further loss of innocent lives and to salvage the prospects for a just peace before it is too late and the consequences are too grave — something not unimaginable in the current international environment.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Danon (Israel): Before we begin, I want to convey my heartfelt condolences to the people of Côte d'Ivoire on the sudden passing of our colleague, Ambassador Bernard Tanoh-Boutchoue.

Last week, Israel marked the 70th anniversary of our independence. It was a joyous occasion celebrating the return to our historic homeland and all we have accomplished in seven short decades. But it was also a time to recall how fragile our independence was for many years. The day Israel was established, we were attacked on all sides. At least once in every decade following 1948, our survival came into immediate question.

Today, Israel is stronger than ever. We have built a robust, flourishing democracy, an open society dedicated to freedom. And even though our survival may not be in question as it once was, our country faces very real threats. We have learned the hard way that Iran spreads its tentacles all over the globe. It promotes terrorism on our borders and instability worldwide.

To our north, we face two of these Iranian proxies — the terrorists of Hizbullah, who have amassed over 100,000 rockets and missiles aimed at our cities and towns, and the dangerous Al-Assad regime in Syria, the Iranian puppet that poisons its own people.

To our south, we have the Hamas-controlled Gaza. Hamas is an internationally designated terrorist organization. It is amassing its own stockpile of rockets to fire at our citizens while continuing to dig terror tunnels underground. It is that same barbaric entity that holds Israeli citizens hostage and denies the families of two of our soldiers the basic dignity of burying their loved ones.

For the past few weeks, Hamas has orchestrated a series of provocations and confrontations along the security fence between Israel and Gaza. Hamas and the Palestinian Authority continue to claim that those protests are peaceful demonstrations of solidarity. They are not. There is nothing peaceful about placing explosives on the fence separating Israel from Gaza. There is nothing peaceful about terrorists firing over the fence at our positions. And there is nothing peaceful about setting off firebombs, burning tires and throwing Molotov cocktails. Throughout the riots of the past month, Hamas has used innocent Palestinian women and children as human shields, while they cowered behind in safety. The terrorists are hiding while allowing — even hoping — for their people to die. This is evil in its purest form.

Israel has an obligation to protect its citizens and we will do so while minimizing civilian casualties to the other side. The fact is that despite these impossible conditions, the vast majority of those killed were confirmed members of terrorist organizations. As our former Prime Minister, Golda Meir, said, peace between our peoples will come only when you love your own children more than you hate us. Unfortunately, that quote still correctly describes the Palestinian leadership today. Like any law-abiding country, Israel always ensures that, when necessary, incidents are investigated by the proper authorities.

But let me be clear: Israel will never apologize for defending our country. It is Israel that cares so deeply about innocent lives. It is the Palestinian leaders who exploit every innocent death for its shameless public relations campaign. And it is Hamas that is fully responsible for every Palestinian injury and death that has resulted from these incidents.

Just two weeks ago, while too many in the world were distracted by Palestinian propaganda, Israel's security forces uncovered the longest and deepest Hamas terror tunnel discovered to date. If we had not detected and neutralized this terror tunnel, Hamas terrorists would have used it to infiltrate Israel and attack our communities.

Some members of the Council have criticized our response. But they must ask themselves a simple question: how would Kuwait, for instance, react if armed terrorists were marching on its border? What would Sweden or Bolivia do to protect their people if a violent mob threatened to infiltrate their countries? The answer is simple. They would defend themselves. We will do the same. Our citizens live just a few hundred metres from the security fence; we will protect them.

Make no mistake: these are not peaceful protests. They are not grass-roots efforts, and they will only become deadlier. These riots are fully orchestrated by Hamas, and, according to Hamas leadership, the protests will continue until at least 15 May. As Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh said:

> "On Friday we stopped at the border. Next time, we do not know where the border will be".

Hamas's goal is clear: to infiltrate Israeli territory, either above or below ground, and to harm as many innocents as possible.

If the Council wishes to put an end to these riots, if it does not want to see more violence, then it must condemn Hamas. It must hold the Palestinian leadership accountable and demand that it end this charade, once and for all.

We speak often of the threats posed by Hamas, Hizbullah and the Al-Assad regime in Syria. But we cannot forget that these threats lead back to one source — one common thread. The Iranian regime is the dangerous thread that ties these threats together.

We are presenting this image to the world so it can understand the depth of Iran's involvement in Syria. What can be seen here is Iran's central induction and recruitment centre in Syria. There are more than 80,000 Shia militants in Syria under Iranian control. It is at this base, just over 5 miles from Damascus, where they are trained to commit acts of terror in Syria and across the region.

This is yet another example of Iran's presence in Syria, about which we have warned the Council time and again, a presence that includes the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, airfields, weapons factories and key elements of Syria's economy. In February, Iran launched an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) from Syria into Israel. Luckily, the Israeli air force was able to shoot it down. Our thorough investigation has left no doubt that this drone was an Iranian UAV. It shares key indicators and markers of the Iranian Shahed-129s that have fallen over Syria and Pakistan in recent years. When we investigated the remains of the downed UAV, we discovered that it contained explosive materials. Those materials were different from those used in the missiles that intercepted it.

The conclusion is clear: that UAV not only violated our sovereignty, but was intended to be used as an offensive weapon against targets in Israel.

These threats can be stopped, but only if the international community acts together. In just two and half weeks, the United States will announce its decision regarding the fate of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Iran claims that its nuclear pursuits are peaceful and purely for self-defence, though nothing could be further from the truth. The regime proudly parades its missiles in city centres. Written on the sides of these missiles are calls to destroy Israel. Iran's leaders make no effort to hide their hope of wiping Israel off the map.

President Trump is focused on important changes to the current situation, because he knows it will make the world safer. He knows that we must change course, and we must do it now. International inspectors must be granted full access to all suspicious nuclear sites in Iran, including military facilities. Iran must end the development and testing of its advanced ballistic-missile programme. And the agreement's expiration date must be extended or eliminated.

We must increase monitoring and oversight of Iran's finances, which have grown significantly since the JCPOA lifted the sanctions. Iran has sent this new money directly to Hizbullah, which has used it to build weapons factories and terror bases in Syria and Lebanon. It has spent it on the Houthis, who continue to attack the Gulf region with sophisticated arms and ballistic missiles. It has reinforced Iran's role as the largest State sponsor of terrorism in the world.

All the signatories to the agreement must now make a choice. Will they support the necessary changes, or will they choose to enable the Iranian regime, which supports terror and seeks to take over the Middle East? They have one final opportunity to right the wrongs of this deal. The world's moral majority has an obligation to end this Iranian threat. They cannot afford to put their economic desires over the safety and security of our world.

The choice has come to this: countries, individuals and corporations must choose between doing business with Iran or ensuring a stable world. They cannot have it both ways.

Israel has had a very clear policy since the Administration of Prime Minister Menachem Begin. We will not allow regimes that seek our destruction to acquire nuclear weapons. Period. If there is the necessary will on the part of the international community, Iran can be stopped from financing, training and arming terrorists. Iran can be stopped from enabling puppet regimes and exploiting their countries as bases for aggression. And most importantly, Iran can be stopped from becoming a nuclear super-Power and a grave threat to the world.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I have spoken many times about my strong belief that this monthly debate should be used to shed light on the many different sources of conflict and instability in the Middle East. There are, unfortunately, many to choose from, some of which prompt disagreement in the Security Council. But today, I want to address an issue about which there should be no disagreement. That issue is the use of innocent children, women and men as human shields.

Tragically, this outrageous practice is reaching epic proportions in the region. A week ago today, the European Parliament passed a resolution condemning Hamas for its use of human shields. We were pleased to see this action. It is difficult to think of a more cowardly act, even for a terrorist, than hiding behind innocent civilians. The use of human shields deliberately gives an advantage to those with no regard for human life and is a disadvantage for those who seek to minimize civilian casualties. The use of human shields is not confined to any one conflict; it is present across the Middle East in virtually every conflict. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) routinely used human shields in Iraq. ISIS fighters took advantage of the presence of civilians in their homes, hospitals, schools and mosques.

When they were forced out of their positions, ISIS went from door to door rounding up families and forcing them to accompany their fighters as they evacuated their locations. Hizbullah has also endangered civilians by positioning its fighters and its weapons among them. Its terrorists use schools, hospitals and apartment buildings to shield its war arsenal in Lebanon. In the course of its massive arms build-up, Hizbullah has turned Lebanese villages into military compounds, stationing weapons depots, rocket launchers and command posts in, around and under the civilian population, in blatant defiance of

resolution 1701 (2006). Hundreds of Lebanese villages are home to Hizbullah rockets and fighters. There are press reports that every third or fourth house in South Lebanon is in some way being used by Hizbullah to shield its activities.

Another example is Yemen. The United Nations has reported that Houthi militants have used Yemeni civilians as human shields.

Lastly, Hamas has exploited and endangered the very Palestinian people it claims to represent by locating rocket launchers near schools, apartment buildings, hotels, churches and United Nations facilities. It has been less than a year since a Hamas terror tunnel was discovered underneath two schools belonging to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in Gaza. That means that United Nations facilities were being used a cover for Hamas' military infrastructure.

I note the threads of commonality that run through those examples.

The first is Iran. As usual, Iran is the patron and protector of many of the groups that fight from behind the bodies of innocent civilians. Groups that Iran have sponsored or supported have perfected the tactic of using human shields and have inspired others to do the same. That is part of Iran's overarching efforts to destabilize the region — efforts that include illegal weapons shipments to Yemen and invading Israeli air space with armed drones from Syrian territory.

The second common thread is the dramatic risk to civilians. For those willing to sacrifice the innocent, there is no way to lose. Innocent civilians either provide cover for military infrastructure or they become victims that rally the international media to their cause. Either way, innocent civilians are caught in the crossfire and exploited for illegitimate military and political purposes. All decent nations and responsible militaries seek to minimize civilian casualties in warfare. Those who want to reduce civilian casualties in the Middle East must focus their attention on the actors, including non-State actors, who intentionally keep their military infrastructure in close proximity to civilians.

The use of civilians to intentionally shield otherwise lawful military targets from attack is a war crime. As is so often the case, it is the most vulnerable who pay the price for the use of human shields. Commandeering homes puts families who are already in wae zones at additional risk. Locating rocket launchers next to schools eliminates safe places for children. Putting command posts in the hospital shows complete disregard for the sick, injured and the elderly. Each time ISIS, Hizbullah or Hamas succeeds in using a village, a family or a child to protect its terrorist operations, the use of that grotesque tactic grows. It is a win for the groups that are willing to endanger civilian populations in order to accomplish their political objectives. It is a loss for the people who play by the rules and seek to minimize, rather than maximize civilian casualties.

Anyone who cares about the safety of Lebanese families should condemn that practice. Anyone who cares about the lives of Yemenis or Palestinians should demand accountability for the militants who exploit them. Anyone who truly cares about children in Gaza should insist that Hamas immediately stop using children as cannon fodder in its conflict with Israel. That is an issue that transcends the usual debates in the Chamber. It is quite simply an issue of decency. Humankind itself loses when the barbaric practice of human shields is tolerated and unanswered. For humankind's sake the Security Council must rise up to address that threat.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General for his briefing. I also thank the other two speakers for their statements.

I think that it is obvious that the ongoing violence on Gaza's borders has made the past weeks particularly challenging for all of us who are committed to pursuing a revived Middle East peace process. The United Kingdom is deeply concerned about the recent increase in violence and the resulting high number of Palestinians killed and injured. We continue to strongly urge Israel to show restraint in their response to the protests and all actors to abide by their obligations under international law. In particular we, along with Ambassador Haley, reiterate the importance of protecting minors.

That said, it is crystal clear that Hamas and its operatives have been exploiting those protests for their own benefit. Israel has the right to secure itself against Hamas and other terrorist groups. Given the importance of accountability, we support an independent and transparent investigation. We therefore welcome Israel's commitment to investigating the conduct of operations.

We urge that its findings be made public and if wrong doing is found that those responsible be held to account.

The immediate concern must be preventing further violence. We urge all parties to show maximum restraint and to do their utmost to prevent further escalation and loss of life. In particular, we urge Israelis to reconsider the use of live fire and we urge the Palestinian leadership to maintain its calls for non-violent protests. Palestinians have a fundamental right to protest peacefully, but those with influence over Hamas must make clear that the use of violence and aggressive tactics is unacceptable and will do nothing to further the Palestinian cause. The violence has, sadly, put added strain on the already dire humanitarian situation in Gaza. That is particularly true of the health sector, which was already operating far beyond capacity.

The parties must do all they can to address the underlying causes of the dire economic and humanitarian situation. We look to Israel to lift its movement and access restrictions on people and goods, including by urgently granting medical permits. While we welcome last week's brief reopening of the Rafah crossing, we urge Egypt to open it on a more permanent basis in order to ease the suffering of ordinary citizens in Gaza. Hamas must decide whether or not it is prepared to work for the good of the Gazan people and join efforts for peace, or whether it will continue to use terror and neglect the basic needs of Gaza's population.

The international community has an important role to play in improving the humanitarian situation. That includes continued support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which provides essential services to some of the most vulnerable Palestinian refugees. We believe that the situation in Gaza could be radically improved through the return of the Palestinian Authority. The United Kingdom remains strongly supportive of a Hamas-Fatah reconciliation, which would see the Palestinian Authority resuming Government functions in Gaza and restoring effective and accountable governance. We welcome Egypt's facilitation role and would like to encourage it to help the parties discuss the most difficult issues, such as security.

The Special Coordinator, Mr. Mladenov, has shown outstanding leadership on both reconciliation and on progressing access and projects to improve the situation in Gaza. As ever, I would like to reiterate that the United Kingdom stands ready to assist him.

Like many worthwhile things, the process towards peace requires much patience. But we know from history that violence will not help us to achieve that ultimate goal and that the conflict will be resolved only through a political process to a two-State solution. There is an urgent need for renewed negotiations that can end the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and deliver peace and safe, secure and sovereign homes for Palestinians and Israelis alike. The United Kingdom, again, will be committed to doing all we can to support that goal.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict cannot be seen in isolation from the many other conflicts in the Middle East. Israel's security, let alone its existence, should not be put at risk by any United Nations Member State. The missile build-up in Syria and elsewhere offers a clear risk of escalation, and a slide into further violence in Israel and the occupied territories would have a significant detrimental effect on stability in the wider region.

Since the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) agreement was mentioned by the Israeli Ambassador, I would like to recall that the United Kingdom's position on it remains clear. We believe that it is a crucial agreement that makes the world safer and contributes to regional and global security by neutralizing the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran, and we engage all partners as we take discussions on the JCPOA forward.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing. The question of Palestine is fundamental to the situation in the Middle East and to the issue of achieving peace there. Only by fully resolving it can the situation in the Middle East be fundamentally alleviated. At he construction of settlements continues with rising violence, and tensions in the Gaza Strip are obvious. China is closely following such developments and is concerned about the high number of casualties resulting from the conflict.

China calls on the Security Council and the international community to remain united and work with a greater sense of urgency to promote a political settlement to the question of Palestine, which is in the fundamental interests of Palestinians and Israelis alike and is the common aspiration of the people of the Middle East and the world at large. .

The two-State solution is the correct way to resolve the Palestinian issue. The international community

should adhere to the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative; step up its efforts to promote and resume negotiations, effectively implement resolution 2334 (2016), stop all settlement activities in the occupied territories, and take measures to prevent violence against civilians.All parties should remain calm, exercise restraint, meet each other halfway and avoid adopting measures that could exacerbate the situation. They should also create conditions conducive to the resumption of negotiations. Parties with strong influence in the Middle East should also assume a constructive role to that end.

China has always firmly supported and promoted the Middle East peace process. We support the establishment of a fully sovereign and independent State of Palestine, based on the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. Chinese President Xi Jinping's four-point proposal in favour of the settlement of the Palestinian question includes the promotion of a political process based on a two-State solution; adherence to a shared, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security concept; improved coordination of international efforts to rally support for peace; and the implementation of a holistic approach promoting peace through development. On that basis, China will endeavour to play a constructive role in the implementation of that proposal and in the realization of the peace process in the Middle East.

The issue of Jerusalem is complex, sensitive and at the very heart of a solution to the question of Palestine. All parties should respect the plurality of its history, adhere to impartiality and fairness, and implement international consensus to achieve peaceful coexistence. In accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions, all parties should reach a solution acceptable to all and accommodate the interests of all parties through the final-status negotiations.

At present, the occupied Palestinian territories are facing even greater security and humanitarian challenges, especially in Gaza, where the humanitarian crisis has deteriorated. The international community must not forget the millions of Palestinian refugees to whom humanitarian assistance must continue to be provided. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East has played an irreplaceable role in alleviating the humanitarian crisis in the occupied territories. We call on all parties to continue to step up their support to the Agency and to countries that host Palestinian refugees so as to ease the humanitarian situation of the refugees.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like at the outset to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his precise and enlightening briefing, as well as for the clear warning bells he has sounded today. We also thank him and his team for their exemplary commitment.

We have been saying for years that the reality on the ground is wrongly described as the status quo; it is in fact marked by a daily deterioration of the situation, which could erupt into an open crisis at any time in Gaza, Jerusalem or the West Bank. Decade after decade, peace has given way not only on the ground, but also in speeches, in minds and in hearts, as successive generations of Palestinians and Israelis lose hope for a resolution of the conflict. The ongoing occupation, the intensification of settlement activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and the blockade imposed on Gaza, as well as the inter-Palestinian division and the continued violence, are creating an untenable and unstable situation, as demonstrated by the three conflicts that have struck Gaza over the past decade. In that context and for the reasons Mr. Nickolay Mladenov outlined, May will be a month of grave danger. The elements for escalation and even conflagration are present. It is therefore urgent for us to coordinate our efforts to convey the right message to the stakeholders.

The ongoing situation in Gaza — on which my first and main point will focus — is yet another tragic illustration of the human consequences resulting from the stalemate in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In addition to the ongoing risk of an armed escalation that those tensions are fuelling, the outcome of the repression of the weekly demonstrations that have been taking place for a month is tragic. After four consecutive Fridays of protests in Gaza near the border with Israel, at least 35 people have been killed, including two minors and two journalists, as well as several hundred wounded by bullets.

We are extremely concerned by those developments and their recurrence, which aggravate an already tense situation in the Gaza Strip. A line was crossed in the violence from the first Friday of protests, and the level of violence has remained constant since then. The very heavy toll of the demonstrations in recent weeks, which we deplore, is directly linked to the inadequate and disproportionate response now regularly offered by the Israeli security forces. Full light must be shed on

these serious events. We take note of the announcement made by the Israeli Defence Forces concerning the establishment of a fact-finding mechanism. Beyond those first steps, we recall the Secretary-General's request for an independent and transparent inquiry.

Two fundamental requirements must immediately be put in place in order to avoid having the same causes produce the same dramatic effects during the next two Fridays and around the dates of 14 and 15 May. The first requirement is respect for international humanitarian law, which is fully applicable in the Gaza Strip, in particular the responsibility to protect civilians.

The second requirement is respect for human rights, in particular the right to demonstrate peacefully. The measures taken to preserve the security of Israel, which is a legitimate concern and one that we share, must fall within the framework of international human rights law. We therefore call on the Israeli authorities to exercise judgement, restraint and the proportionate use of such force as is strictly necessary. We condemn the successive, indiscriminate firings on protesters over the past month. Israel is a democracy and as such must apply standard international rules of engagement in the maintenance of order. The use of lethal weapons must be rejected when facing unarmed demonstrators who pose no serious or imminent threat. Several Israeli and Palestinian non-governmental organizations have conveyed the same message. At the same time, we call on protesters to refrain from all outbursts and violence, and we caution those, in particular Hamas, who would seek to take over and exploit the demonstrations or use them to challenge Israel's security along the security fence.

In Gaza, but also in the West Bank and Jerusalem, where the protest movement threatens to spread in the coming weeks, the risk that the situation will degenerate and escape control is extremely high, and this is taking place in an already tense regional context. Everyone must therefore show restraint and a spirit of responsibility. It is up to the Council to speak with a strong voice so as to prevent escalation. The silence of the Council since the beginning of the crisis must immediately give way to a sign of unity and a clear public expression.

I come to my second point. The violence of recent weeks cannot be dissociated from the more general situation in the Gaza Strip, which itself must not be separated from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a whole. The deterioration in the humanitarian situation in Gaza over the past year, characterized in particular by an unprecedented energy crisis and the worsening of the wage crisis, is closely linked to the inter-Palestinian division. That deterioration adds to the structural humanitarian crisis imposed by the Israeli blockade, which has lasted for more than a decade. It feeds the ongoing protest movement among a very young population, which feels it has nothing to lose.

Beyond the de-escalation that is required in the immediate future, there will be no lasting solution in Gaza without Palestinian reconciliation under the principles endorsed by the Palestine Liberation Organization, and without the exercise by the Palestinian Authority of the full extent of its authority in Gaza. In that regard, we call for the implementation of the agreement reached in Cairo on 12 October under the auspices of the Egyptian authorities. That process must lead to a rapid improvement in the living conditions of the population in Gaza. We encourage the Palestinian Authority to take concrete steps in that direction. Beyond that, only a lifting of the blockade and the restrictions imposed on Gaza, with the necessary security guarantees for Israel, will meet the needs and expectations of the population. France stands ready to support those efforts.

In the current extremely fragile situation, the presence of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) among the population, two-thirds of which is comprised of Palestinian refugees, is one of the last remaining stabilizing elements in Gaza. An interruption of UNRWA services, which could take place as early as this summer, would hasten the Gaza Strip's falling into chaos. We therefore once again call on the United States not to give up the historic and essential role it has played with UNRWA. We also call for increased efforts on the part of all donors to the Agency, which were announced last month during the Rome Conference and which will have to continue. As you know, France is playing its part in those efforts.

Turning to my final point, we must not separate the situation in Gaza from the Palestinian question as a whole. Gaza is an integral part of the Palestinian territories. There will be no Palestinian State without Gaza, and therefore no viable peace agreement with Israel without Palestinian unity. Neither will there be a peace agreement between Israelis and Palestinians outside the internationally agreed parameters, the principal elements of which I shall recall here once

again: two States living in peace and security along secure and recognized borders; frontiers based on the 1967 lines, with exchanges of mutually agreed territories; Jerusalem as the future capital of the two States with, in the meantime, no change in the status of the city, as required by resolution 478 (1980), including the location of embassies; and a concerted, realistic and fair solution for Palestinian refugees.

Any negotiation must be within that framework, which itself is based on international law and Security Council resolutions. Those parameters are not options or a menu from which we may choose; they are the bedrock of any peace plan and of any future negotiations. In that context, we have a collective responsibility within the Council to ensure the respect of those parameters, which we have defined together and which are recalled by resolution 2334 (2016), adopted a little more than a year ago. The Gaza Strip is once again on the edge of the abyss. A new conflict, beyond the devastating consequences already mentioned, would aggravate regional tensions, which have reached an unprecedented level along Israel's border. The ongoing escalation in Gaza is also strengthening radicals and providing all terrorist movements with additional recruitment arguments.

Finally, with the approach of a high-risk May in Jerusalem, current tensions contribute to the ongoing shift from a political conflict that can be resolved through concessions made by the parties to a religious conflict in which it would be impossible to reach a compromise. France will never allow such a dramatic prospect for Israelis, Palestinians and regional security to become a reality. That is why we remain determined to act. We all know that the destinies of Israelis and Palestinians are linked: neither of the two peoples will achieve their national aspirations at the expense of the other. France is not choosing sides. It is the friend of both Israelis and Palestinians, and it is in that capacity that it pursues its clear goal: the implementation, through dialogue, of a political solution for a just and lasting peace between Israel and Palestine.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): At the outset, let me thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for, as always, a very comprehensive and insightful briefing. I would like also to thank the speakers, the Ambassadors of Palestine and of Israel.

I would like to align myself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union.

Poland strongly supports all initiatives aimed at the stabilization and strengthening of peace and security in the Middle East. Unfortunately, since our previous quarterly debate (S/PV.8167), there has not been any significant progress towards the achievement of peace. On the contrary, the situation on the ground continues to deteriorate. That is why we should keep the Middle East peace process high on our agenda. Today more than ever before, our main goal should be the resumption of a meaningful peace process. Our commitment to resolving one of the longest-standing conflicts on our agenda needs to be reinforced. Only a return to meaningful bilateral negotiations, based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and international law, can make a positive impact on the process. That is the only path leading towards a two-State solution and resolving all final-status issues.

The creation of a political horizon, as well as an appropriate framework for political progress, will be possible only working together with our regional and international partners, beginning with the Middle East Quartet. The participation and peace proposals of the United States would especially be helpful in renewing the Middle East peace process. The constructive development of solutions for achieving peace will also require more active involvement on the part of some countries of the region. Unfortunately, recent developments in the Gaza Strip are extremely alarming. The situation on the ground is very volatile. We share the Special Coordinator's opinion that we run the risk of a regional spillover of the conflict, especially as the region is already facing many other challenges. We should do our utmost to avoid any further escalation and loss of life. In that context, Poland underlines the crucial role that the United Nations can play to that end, including the particular role played by Special Coordinator Mladenov.

We urge Israel to respect the fundamental right to peaceful protest. We also call on Israel to respect the principle of proportionality with regard to the use of force, especially when directed against unarmed protesters, while it seeks to defend its legitimate security interest. At the same time, leaders and organizers of protests have to avoid incitement to violence and refrain from exploiting protesters for other purposes. We call for an independent and objective investigation of the incidents that have taken place on the Israeli-Gaza

border since 30 March. In that context, we take note of the fact-finding assessment mechanism established by the Israel Defence Forces to review their actions and specific incidents that have taken place on the Israeli-Gaza border.

Overall, we attach extreme importance to the prevention of any further escalation and loss of life. We call on all sides to act with the utmost restraint and responsibility. In that regard, we call for the respect of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians. As has already been mentioned, the current situation in Gaza can have significant consequences for regional and international peace and security. It is the Security Council's responsibility to address the situation in an effective way. The Security Council should, therefore, contribute to de-escalation efforts, including by publicly articulating its position in an appropriate manner.

In line with the long-standing European Union position, we reiterate our position on Jerusalem. We firmly believe that the status of the city should enjoy the mutual recognition of both parties' historical relation and national claim to the city. We continue to respect the international consensus on Jerusalem embodied in, inter alia, resolution 478 (1980), including on the location of diplomatic representations, until the final status of Jerusalem is resolved. We support the two-State solution, under which the national aspirations of both parties to the conflict would be met, including the Palestinian right to self-determination and independence, as well as Israel's right to ensure its security and the normalization of relations with Arab States.

We are closely following developments in the intra-Palestinian reconciliation, and hope that that process will be successful. However, we are aware that reconciliation efforts have suffered severe setbacks following the assassination attempt against Prime Minister Hamdallah on 13 March. We therefore urge all Palestinian factions to work together to ensure the sustainable development of that process, thereby allowing the Palestinian Authority to assume once again its full responsibilities in Gaza. One single and legitimate Palestinian Authority could be an important step towards achieving the unity of a future Palestinian State and the basis for a sustainable peace agreement.

We are deeply concerned about the deteriorating financial situation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The effects of reducing support could include grave security and humanitarian consequences not only in the Palestinian territories, but also in other countries hosting refugees. The Agency is already facing the great challenge of fulfilling its mandate to maintain the key services that it provides, such as education and health care for Palestinian refugees. In the absence of a lasting political solution, the international community cannot abdicate its responsibility and duty vis-à-vis Palestinian refugees and must ensure the continuation of the Agency's work on a sound financial foundation. For its part, Poland will continue to support UNRWA through its financial contributions.

In conclusion, allow me to briefly mention Lebanon and reaffirm our strong support for the territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence of that country. We underline the significance of the upcoming parliamentary elections — the first of their kind since 2009 — to be held in May. We support all efforts to strengthen Lebanon's long-standing tradition of democracy, freedom and diversity, which stands as a model for the whole region.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): I would like to express our appreciation to Special Coordinator Mladenov for his comprehensive briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, which was, as always, very helpful. We appreciate how difficult it is for Mr. Mladenov to discharge his responsibilities in the mission that he has been called on to carry out, but he has continued to pass the test in terms of the integrity with which he fulfils his obligations. We pay tribute to him for his efforts.

The peace and security situation in the Middle East is getting more complicated by the day. Even though the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant has been defeated and lost much of its territory, fighting still continues unabated in Syria. In fact, in many ways, the whole complex set of issues surrounding Syria — while the country and its people are being devastated — often appears bigger than Syria alone. Whether it is the Syrian or the Yemeni crisis, there are no political solutions in sight, and those situations remain a source of despair for ordinary people. The humanitarian situation in the region is appalling, and the need for international support is enormous. The use of chemical weapons — even if we have yet to decisively attribute responsibility and therefore establish accountability — is becoming a serious challenge undermining international norms.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has been overshadowed by other crisis situations in the region, is now once again drawing international attention, as it should. The recent situation in Gaza is a source of great concern, and, unless efforts are made to de-escalate the situation, it is bound to further complicate the peace and security situation in the region. One would, of course, have to be heartless not to be affected by the loss of lives. There is a great need to do everything necessary politically to prevent the situation in Gaza from getting out of hand. We must take the Special Envoy's words seriously. He said earlier with a heavy heart that Gaza is ready to explode, words that should indeed be heeded.

We are, of course, deeply concerned by the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza, and every possible effort must be made to facilitate critical humanitarian solutions and revitalize Gaza's economy. In addition, we should consider the need to enable the Palestinian Authority to exercise full control over Gaza based on the Cairo agreement. We believe that progress on that issue will not only improve the economic and humanitarian situation, but will also advance Palestinian unity, which hopefully could provide impetus for the peace process. Although the signing of the agreement was very welcome, not much progress has been made in terms of its implementation, and that, coupled with the restrictions on access, continues to exacerbate the humanitarian situation.

Ethiopia's position on the Israeli-Palestinian dispute has always been unambiguous and very transparent. As much as we support the right of Israel to exist in peace and security, we also support the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the right of Palestine to exist as a free and independent State. Accordingly, Ethiopia fully supports the goal of two States living side by side in peace and security as the only viable option for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. We believe that that is not only in the best interest of both Israel and Palestine, but it will also significantly advance peace and security in the Middle East region.

However, it seems to us self-evident that, lately, moves have been made and actions have been taken that might not contribute to making progress toward resolving the outstanding issues on the basis of the two-State formula. Such actions not only increase frustration and mistrust, but are also undermining the very viability of the two-State solution. The removal of those long-standing obstacles is imperative in order to create the necessary conditions for progress in negotiations between the two parties aimed at achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting solution on the basis of mutual trust and a spirit of compromise, a solution that ensures Israel's security and Palestine's aspirations for statehood. That is what the situation calls for, and it is also in the best interest of the two parties, as well as that of the international community as a whole. The latest tragedy in Gaza makes it obvious that the demand for justice will never disappear as long as there are objective facts on the ground that call for it.

That is why we supported the call for the intensification and acceleration of international and regional efforts aimed at achieving a comprehensive, lasting and just solution. Indeed, the resumption of negotiations requires the full support of all partners, and all should play their part in order for any meaningful progress to be achieved. In that context, it is incumbent upon the Council to discharge its responsibilities and support such efforts for the sake of peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians and peace in the broader Middle Eastern region. No doubt, at the end of the day, the responsibility for making progress toward lasting peace and mutual accommodation, based on justice and fair play, falls on the two parties.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Mladenov for his customary concise and incisive briefing, which elucidated for us the current situation in the Middle East in general and in Gaza in particular.

We want to begin by expressing our serious concerns about the conflicts that persist in the Middle East from Syria to Yemen and Lebanon and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, leading to enormous losses in human life and humanitarian devastation on a broad scale, particularly in the case of Yemen and several regions in Syria and in the Gaza Strip. It is regrettable to note that, far from seeing any signs of a resolution to those conflicts, we are seeing them deteriorate with the danger of greater devastation, such as in the case of Israel and Palestine in the Gaza Strip.

We must recognize that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has lasted for a long time now and is fundamental and central to the entire situation in the Middle East. We can hardly expect to achieve peace in the region without a fair and lasting solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The significance and

gravity of the conflict lie not only in the fact that it is causing great suffering to those who are directly affected, but also in the undeniable impact that it has on stability in the region.

We have already seen how the ramifications of the Syrian conflict are directly affecting the situation, as recent events show. Efforts must be aimed at preventing an escalation. The parties must refrain from unilateral actions that could hinder initiatives geared towards dialogue aimed at resolving the issue. Such a resolution requires a commitment by the parties to negotiate in a direct and frank process without preconditions and within the framework of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative and the principle of land for peace. The final status of Jerusalem must also be part of the outcome of those negotiations.

In order to facilitate that process, the parties must refrain from unilateral acts that could hinder dialogue or further complicate an already precarious situation. It is important that the parties respect resolution 2334 (2016). We reiterate our call to both sides to strive for peaceful coexistence, to respect international law and to act in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, so as to arrive at a solution that satisfies the interests of all parties.

There is no other possible solution to the Palestinian question than a two-State solution in which Israelis and Palestinians alike live in peace and security. The international community must support the process by offering guarantees aimed at achieving a successful outcome. Actors with influence in the Middle East must play a decisive role in convincing the parties to engage in the dialogue process. The international community has no choice but to redouble its diplomatic and mediation efforts to the best of its ability in order to seek a satisfactory solution. However, let us not fool ourselves, only Palestinians and Israelis have the ability to resolve the problem.

Equatorial Guinea believes that the historical demands of the Palestinians are just, in accordance with the various positions taken by the African Union. However, we also believe that Israel has every right to live in peace and security. Palestine and Israel must respect each other's right to exist and avoid any action that could aggravate the current situation. Similarly, we call for intra-Palestinian dialogue and for Palestinians to resolve their differences, which we believe could help achieve a lasting solution to the conflict in general.

Equatorial Guinea condemns the acts of violence that took place during the Great March of Return convened by Palestinian civil and political organizations, which resulted in the deaths of dozens of Palestinians and hundreds of injured in the Gaza Strip. We very much regret the loss of human lives and would like to make a vigorous appeal for an independent and transparent investigation into those deaths in order to clarify the circumstances surrounding them and their cause.

The continuing outbreaks of violence between Palestine and Israel are a source of concern for Equatorial Guinea, as is the serious humanitarian situation in Gaza. The humanitarian situation of the population in Gaza, with problems of water, electricity and so on, which Mr. Mladenov recently called a humanitarian, economic and ecological calamity (see S/PV.8183), requires urgent action in the form of projects. We must work together to alleviate that humanitarian disaster and provide full support for Egypt's reconciliation efforts. It is very urgent that no effort be spared to avoid the risk of conflagration in the Gaza Strip, which, as Mr. Mladenov clearly pointed out in his briefing, would have devastating consequences and could deteriorate into another open war in Gaza.

Finally, I would also like to express our appreciation to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for its efforts to alleviate the humanitarian situation and crisis in the occupied territories. We call on the international community to resolutely support UNRWA so that it can carry out its work and alleviate the suffering of the people in the occupied territories.

Mr. Dah (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation thanks Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his enlightening briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Côte d'Ivoire is concerned about the escalation of violence during the Great March of Return, organized by the Palestinians along the fence separating the Gaza Strip and Israel; that violence is entering its third consecutive week. Our concern is justified by the heavy toll accompanying those demonstrations, which have resulted in the deaths of 37 Palestinians and more than 4,000 injured as a result of the various clashes. My country would like to highlight the fact that such

violence only exacerbates the tensions between the Israeli and Palestinian sides, sustaining the doubts and uncertainties over the continuation of the peace process, which has been stalled since 2014.

In view of that new outbreak of violence, my country remains convinced that there is no alternative to peace. It urges the parties concerned to exercise restraint, to engage in constructive dialogue and to refrain, on both sides, from unilateral actions, which can only further distance the prospects for a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis. My country takes this opportunity to reaffirm its principled position in support of a negotiated settlement that prioritizes the two-State solution, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

My delegation also remains concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza, which is heavily impacted by the ongoing blockade, youth unemployment and the shortages of water and electricity. We welcome the pledges made at the extraordinary ministerial conference held in Rome on 15 March aimed at reducing the budget deficit of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which has been facing a decrease in the usual contributions to its operation.

Finally, we reaffirm our full support for the initiatives under way to find a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in particular the plan of the President of the Palestinian Authority to organize an international peace conference in mid-May, with broad international participation.

In addition to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Middle East also faces a series of security challenges, such as the situations in Syria and Yemen and the Iranian nuclear issue.

With regard to Syria, despite the relative calm, my delegation deeply regrets the lack of progress towards a political solution to the conflict, as well as the continuing fighting, which exacerbates the humanitarian situation. Given that worrisome situation, my delegation again regrets that the ceasefire unanimously called for by the Security Council as part of such a solution has not materialized and that the dire humanitarian situation in Syria continues to persist without any apparent end to the conflict. In the light of all of the above, Côte d'Ivoire reiterates its appeal to the parties to the conflict to fully implement resolution 2401 (2018) with a view to allowing unhindered access to humanitarian assistance for those in distress.

My country would like once again to reaffirm its conviction and its principled position that the response to the crisis in Syria cannot be a military one. We continue to believe that the priority still is and always will be to find a political solution that can defuse the Syrian crisis based on an in-depth dialogue involving the key international, regional and Syrian stakeholders.

To that end, Côte d'Ivoire calls on the warring parties to support the path of inclusive political dialogue in the context of the Geneva talks and resolution 2254 (2015), which paves the way for a lasting political settlement of the Syrian crisis. In that regard, Côte d'Ivoire commends the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General to secure the resumption of the peace talks and encourages the Council to lend its full support to that end.

With regard to the conflict in Yemen, my delegation remains particularly concerned about the continuing deterioration in the humanitarian situation and the lack of prospects for a political settlement of the crisis in that country. My country remains, convinced, unfortunately, that, despite our joint efforts, the humanitarian situation in Yemen will continue to deteriorate in the absence of a viable political track.

Finally, my delegation would like to reaffirm its commitment to the unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Yemen. We therefore call on the parties to the conflict to return to the negotiating table with a view to achieving a peaceful settlement of the crisis. In that regard, we welcome the appointment of Mr. Martin Griffiths as the new Special Envoy of the Secretary-General charged with working to achieve the resumption of the intra-Yemeni political dialogue.

We strongly condemn the air strikes on a wedding in Hajjah, in the north-western part of the country, which allegedly killed at least 50 civilians, including children, and injured dozens of people. My delegation also condemns the firing of missiles by the Houthis towards Saudi Arabia, endangering the lives of innocent people.

With regard to the Iranian nuclear issue, my delegation reaffirms its support for the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, adopted under resolution 2231 (2015). It represents a major achievement for the non-proliferation regime and allows for better

supervision of Iran's nuclear activities in return for the gradual lifting of the sanctions against that country.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his comprehensive and objective briefing.

The Middle East is going through a difficult period in its history, marked by many old and new crises. The conflicts in Syria and Yemen still need to be resolved. Political and diplomatic solutions are needed. Further international efforts need to focus on resolving the situation in Libya, helping to rebuild Iraq and supporting stability in Lebanon.

Palestine remains at the centre of the chaos that plagues the region and is the consequence of geopolitical experiments directed from abroad. That is a commonly agreed fact, despite the fact that some actors seek to relegate the issue of a settlement in the Middle East to the background. The developments in the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, where destructive trends are increasingly evident, are of grave concern. Owing to the lack of progress in the political process, a vacuum has been created that is being filled by unilateral measures and provocative rhetoric. The abyss of misunderstanding and mistrust is widening, undermining prospects for the resumption of talks. It is clear that all long-standing issues, including settlement activities, are far from being resolved.

We are concerned about the escalating tensions around Gaza associated with the Palestinian protests in the sector against the Israeli occupation since 30 March. There were dozens of victims on the Palestinian side and hundreds injured. We support the right to peaceful protest and strongly condemn terrorist acts in any form and the indiscriminate use of force against civilians. We call on the parties to refrain from measures that are likely to further exacerbate the situation.

It is not necessary to be an experienced analyst to understand that it is highly likely that the situation will further deteriorate. The plan announced by the United States to hold a ceremony in Jerusalem on 14 May to mark the beginning of the transfer of the United States Embassy from Tel Aviv has a strong destabilizing potential, the negative repercussions of which will be seen not only in Palestinian-Israeli relations but also throughout the region and the entire Muslim world. That is not the only high-profile event related to the Middle East that will take place in the coming months. Given the current situation, it is necessary for the international community to urgently step up its efforts for the resumption of the political process between the Palestinians and Israelis based on the principles of international law and aimed at the implementation of a two-State solution.

Unilateral approaches will not lead to a fair and lasting peace, aimed at fulfilling the national aspirations of Palestinians or strengthen Israel's security. To that end, we are keeping on the table our proposal to convene a summit between the leaders of Palestine and Israel in the Russian Federation. We advocate the resumption of active efforts on the part of the Middle East Quartet of international mediators, which remains, regardless of what some may say, the sole mediation format approved by Security Council resolutions.

We believe that one of the obstacles to the resumption of the peace process is the schism within Palestinian ranks. We continue to deliver assistance to the Palestinians in their efforts to restore their national unity on the basis of the Palestinian Liberation Organization's political platform and the Arab Peace Initiative. It is important for all Palestinian stakeholders to reaffirm their commitment to implementing the agreements reached in Cairo in October 2017 and to focus their efforts on the establishment of the legitimate Palestinian National Authority in the Gaza Strip. We support the relevant efforts undertaken by the leadership of the Arab Republic of Egypt.

We support the delivery of international assistance to Palestinians. It is not acceptable to divert attention away from the humanitarian needs of the Palestinians or to cut financing for the relevant programmes, including throughthe United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which could lead to radicalization within the Palestinian ranks.

To summarize, we wish to stress that the Russian Federation advocates crafting a positive and unifying agenda for the international community as a whole to work on the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. We deem it necessary to conduct a joint analysis of the genesis of the conflicts plaguing the region and to seek alternative means for their settlement. In that context, we believe that the initiatives advanced in the past by Russia have not lost their relevance; on the contrary, they are all the more relevant now. Recent events within and around the Middle East confirm the importance of Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's

proposal to convene a comprehensive review of the situation in the Middle East in the Security Council.

It is also of critical importance to rebuild trust between the Arab world and Iran, to which end it is important to launch a process aimed at building a regional architecture for security that is comprehensive and indivisible. A key factor in that context is safeguarding the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the Iranian nuclear programme. On all of these and other issues, Russia stands ready to work together with interested partners in a transparent and impartial manner, without threats or undue pressure. Dialogue remains a key mechanism for resolving the issues at hand.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his detailed and objective update on the situation in the Middle East. We agree that the situation in the region remains complicated.

In Lebanon, the formation of a new Government and the election of a new President are positive outcomes, which will lead, hopefully, to the holding of free and fair parliamentary elections on 6 May. The signing of the decree to that end is a manifestation of the people's unity. We need to help the country consolidate its constitutional and democratic processes, which remain contingent on developments in neighbouring Syria. The Lebanese Armed Forces play a vital role in maintaining security on the border with Syria and throughout Lebanon, thus averting threats from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and the Jabhat Al-Nusrah. We welcome the outcomes of the international conference hosted in Paris by President Emmanuel Macron to support Lebanon's economic stability. It is commendable that, at that conference, there were pledges of $10.2 billion for Lebanon.

Turning to Yemen, we know that the conflict there has no military solution. It is clear that the deep-seated contradictions in Yemen can be resolved only through a broad-based national and inclusive dialogue. All parties must commit themselves to establishing a new regime for the cessation of hostilities, which will provide an opportunity to revive the economy, resolve the humanitarian crisis and restore basic public services. It is only when there is a political settlement that the humanitarian situation can also be mitigated. Everyone should refrain from committing acts that lead to an escalation of regional tension and insecurity. It is not acceptable to launch rocket attacks against civilian targets in the territory of Saudi Arabia, which is an act that Kazakhstan strongly condemns.

Kazakhstan's position on the Middle East peace process is very clear and remains unchanged. Nevertheless, I would like to repeat it. We support the two-State solution and call for the early resumption of negotiations, especially in the bilateral format and without preconditions, which should be in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, relevant Security Council resolutions, and other mechanisms and initiatives, such as the Quartet road map for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace. We support the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the creation of a free, sovereign and independent State within the internationally recognized borders of 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Jerusalem is the shared homeland of different ethnicities and religions. Palestine and Israel must respect each other's right to exist and avoid taking actions that might further escalate the situation. We look forward to the implementation of the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016), and we would like to note that the increased construction of new Israeli settlements is causing hardships for the Palestinians, who are incurring huge economic losses.

Turning to Gaza, we are alarmed that this is the fourth consecutive week that we are witnessing Palestinian casualties there. We reiterate that Israeli security forces must protect civilians and calibrate the use of force, employing lethal force only as a last resort. At the same time, we emphasize the right of Israel to security. We also reiterate our call on Palestinians to avoid friction at the Gaza fence.

We praise our colleagues at the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for the largest shipment of United Nations medical aid to Gaza since the beginning of the year. That assistance has provided hospitals in Gaza with essential life-saving drugs and other supplies to meet the urgent medical needs of populations in crisis. It will also help respond to the needs of 100,000 children and mothers in Gaza. With regard to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, Kazakhstan reiterates the need to support that important mechanism.

My country underscores the importance of achieving intra-Palestinian unity. The rift between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas should be resolved in order to

present a unified Palestinian voice in negotiations with Israel and the international community. We welcome and support Israel's decision to provide the Palestinians with some economic concessions on the seashore, as was mentioned today by Special Envoy Mladenov, so as to ease the conditions of daily life in the Gaza territory.

Investments in the building of strong Palestinian institutions, inter alia, promoting reforms in the security sector and the military, law-enforcement and judicial and correctional systems, together with new legislation, will ensure the rule of law and good governance. The immediate start of direct negotiations, and, as a result, the speedy implementation of agreements at an early date, will allow us to solve the problem of the confidence deficit and enable us to move to a more open dialogue between the two sides. It is necessary to identify mutually acceptable principles for the advancement of the Palestinian-Israel peace process, as well as to develop a concept for future negotiations and a mechanism for implementing the agreements.

Lastly, we once again reiterate our call for efforts to ensure Israel's right to security and Palestine's right to statehood, with the use of appropriate instruments of preventive diplomacy and sustaining peace, including the utilization of confidence-building measures in political, economic, environmental contexts, and in addressing new challenges and threats.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): I join others in thanking Mr. Mladenov for his precise briefing and dedicated work. Listening to him, we can draw one sole conclusion — we cannot allow the peace process to be put on the back burner.

I align myself with the statement to be made later by the observer of the European Union.

I will focus on three important aspects of the situation in the Middle East: first, the tragedy and lack of de-escalation in Gaza; secondly, the overall peace process and the importance of resolutions 2334 (2016) and 478 (1980); and thirdly, the upcoming elections in Lebanon.

On my first point, Gaza, on 30 March we convened an urgent meeting here in the Council (see PV.8219). It took place as the first demonstration in Gaza ended in tragedy. I concluded my statement with a call on all sides to prevent further escalation. Otherwise, we would have the same debate the next month. Today is the next month. We regret to note that all involved have continued stubbornly on the track they chose then, despite the calls for de-escalation and for the prevention of further losses of life. I trust that all Members feel the same way and would welcome a joint statement in that vein from the Council. The sad score after four weeks of protests is more than 30 people killed, including four minors and thousands of injuries.

We repeat our call on Israel to ensure that its responses are proportionate and necessary at all times, in line with Israel's obligations under international law. The use of live ammunition should be a measure of last resort only, as stated in the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials. The high number of victims, including paramedics, and the death of the journalist Yaser Murtaja raise serious questions regarding the proportionality of the Israeli response. That includes the respect for the right to peaceful protest. Facts must be established regarding reports about violent attacks against Israel under the cover of the protests.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands calls upon the de facto authorities in Gaza and the Palestinian Authority to do everything possible to ensure that protests remain peaceful. We call upon all sides to refrain from making inciting statements. We repeat the call for an independent, transparent investigation. We note the fact-finding assessment mechanism established by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) to review IDF actions and specific incidents that have taken place since 30 March. The Kingdom of the Netherlands will be following its work closely.

The growing crisis in Gaza requires a solution. Economic development, humanitarian aid and the rebuilding of infrastructure need to go hand in hand. The Kingdom of the Netherlands is concerned about the difficult financial situation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and welcomes the additional contributions that were announced. We will continue to support UNRWA in its efforts to improve its financial stability and broaden its international support.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands calls upon Israel to ease restrictions on the movement of goods and people, while safeguarding its security needs. We call upon Hamas to end its efforts to rearm and rebuild its military infrastructure.

We support the efforts to reunite Gaza and the West Bank under one single and legitimate Palestinian

Authority. The attack on Prime Minister Hamdallah further complicated the already difficult process of reconciliation. That negative course needs to be reversed. All Palestinian factions must work genuinely together to overcome the current stalemate and we welcome the ongoing efforts by Egypt and Mr. Mladenov in that regard.

With regard to my second point, the peace process, we cannot afford to put it on the back burner. International law, including humanitarian law and human rights law, provides a cornerstone for peace and security in the region. In that connection, the Kingdom of the Netherlands recalls the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 2334 (2016) and 478 (1980). Those resolutions and the well-known parameters clearly lay out the framework for a sustainable solution to the conflict. In the end, only the parties can come to an agreement on all final-status issues, including Jerusalem and refugees. We underline the need to refrain from unilateral steps that make a two-State solution more difficult.

On my third point, Lebanon, on 6 May Lebanon will hold parliamentary elections for the first time since 2009. We look forward to that memorable occasion. Provided the elections are properly executed, they will reinvigorate public trust in Lebanon's democratic institutions. Above all, the elections provide an opportunity to reinforce the positive momentum of the Rome, Paris and Brussels conferences. We encourage all Lebanese to cast their vote, and we hope that the elections will be an expression of peaceful competition and democracy in action.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we would like to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his valuable briefing regarding recent developments in the peace process and the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Most of our quarterly open debates on this item coincide with very important junctures regarding developments in the Palestinian question, and each time, Israel, the occupying Power, is the one that has violated international treaties, conventions and the relevant Security Council resolutions. The most recent violation is the excessive and illegal use of force against the Great March of Return, which was launched on 30 March and will be ongoing for the coming two weeks. It is a peaceful march where unarmed Palestinian people call for their right to return to their occupied territory. The death toll since the beginning of the March is not less than 37 martyrs, with more than 5,000 injured. In that regard, it is regrettable that the Security Council has failed to respond in a unified manner to condemn all those practices and failed to call for an independent and transparent investigation aimed at identifying those responsible for using such force and for killing scores of innocent people. They must be held accountable for such crimes. We support any appeal to the General Assembly or the Human Rights Council if the Security Council continues to fail to take any measures that oblige Israel to put an end to those grave violations of international humanitarian law, international human rights law and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

On the other hand, the State of Kuwait supports actions and measures that contribute to providing international protection to the Palestinian people. In that regard, we reiterate the provisions of resolutions 605 (1987) and 904 (1994) regarding the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the developments in the occupied Palestinian territory and the necessity of providing the defenceless Palestinian people with international protection. We do not exaggerate when we say that the Israeli occupying forces, commanded by the occupying Power, are constantly defying the will of the international community. There is ample evidences of that. One of the gravest challenges facing the Security Council is Israel's candidature, the occupying Power, to membership in the Security Council.

How can we imagine that such an occupying Power could participate in defending international legitimacy and its resolutions? That occupying Power undoubtedly lacks all qualifications to run for Security Council membership as stipulated by the Charter of the United Nations, because its only credential is a long record of grave violations against resolutions of international legitimacy and the principles of the Charter. That is why the Security Council should be the first to challenge its candidacy.

The unilateral policies, measures and actions taken by Israel, the occupying Power, are a source of concern as it seeks to alter the facts on the ground in the occupied territory, notably the ongoing settlement activities and the expansion of the existing settlements, which is totally illegal and illegitimate and represents a gross violation of international law and Security

Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2334 (2016). The same is true of the relocation of certain diplomatic missions to Jerusalem, which is a blatant violation of relevant Council resolutions, particularly resolutions 476 (1980) and 478 (1980), which considered such unilateral actions null and void, with no legal effect. We emphasize that such steps, which constitute violations of international law, will undermine efforts towards peace, exacerbate tensions, flair the rage and threaten to push the region into more violence, chaos and instability.

The State of Kuwait supports the Palestinian call to give impetus to existing international mechanisms, such as the Quartet, by expanding its membership to include other regional parties, which would revitalize its work, provided this takes place under the umbrella of the United Nations Peace Process.

We also support all legal and peaceful steps taken by the sisterly Palestinian State, at the national and international levels, to consolidate its sovereignty with respect to Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the Palestinian occupied territory. We underscore that in order to achieve the long-desired peace, we must start by putting an end to the Israeli occupation, whose fifty-first anniversary is coming up in 39 days. This should be based on the resolutions of international legitimacy, the principle of land for peace, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative, adopted by all Arab States at the 2002 Beirut summit. It should also be based on the withdrawal of Israel from all Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territories to the 4 June 1967 borders. It should address all final-status issues and thereby eventually lead to the Palestinian people realizing all their political legitimate rights, including their right to self-determination, and the creation of an independent State with east Jerusalem as its capital.

The Palestinian people appeals to the United Nations, especially the Security Council, to fulfil all of the pledges made towards the maintenance of international peace and security. In that regard, we reiterate our solidarity with the Palestinian people in the defence of their just cause and legitimate rights, including their historical and principled rights to Al-Quds Al-Sharif, guaranteed by the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy. We call on States to recognize the state of Palestine, with occupied East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): This open debate is the first to be held since the Palestinian people peacefully began, on 30 March, the so-called March of Return, along the border between Gaza and Israel. It began with a celebration of Earth Day and will end with Al-Nakba, on 15 May, on which date there will be a commemoration of the illegal dispossession of Palestinian territories over the more than 50 years of Israeli occupation. Tributes will be paid to all Palestinian victims who perished as a result of the brutality of the Israeli Government.

According to the latest special report of the World Health Organization, between 15 and 20 April, during the fourth mobilization of the March of Return, four Palestinians, including one child, were murdered, and 832 wounded by the Israel Defense Forces as they demanded an end to the inhuman blockade that Israel has been using to choke the life out of the inhabitants of Gaza for more than 11 years now.

In total, 32 Palestinians perished, including three children, and more than 1,600 persons have suffered a range of injuries over the past four weeks. I need not remind members here that Palestinian victims of the latest events, including those killed by sniper bullets, those seriously wounded by shootings, be it by rubber or lead bullets, are proof positive that the State of Israel is violating the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and is acting in clear breach of the prohibitions set forth in the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.

The Security Council must call on the Government of Israel to fulfil its international obligation to protect the mobilized Palestinian civilians. This body must demand that the relevant international bodies immediately and without further delay conduct an investigation into the events of the past three weeks on the border area between Gaza and Israel. This must be an independent, transparent and conclusive investigation, so as to identify those responsible for firing on Palestinian demonstrators.

In this order of priorities, we wish to place on record once again our strong condemnation of the decision by the Government of the United States and other countries that seek to move their embassies to Jerusalem. These decisions are in violation of several Security Council resolutions, including resolution 478 (1980), which calls for States to withdraw their diplomatic representations from Jerusalem. We would

alert everyone to the fact that as the date for the transfer of the United States embassy to Jerusalem comes closer, we will see an increase in tensions and violence on the ground in the region.

My delegation wishes to state its categorical rejection of the clear intent of the Government of Israel, with respect to the construction of settlements in occupied Palestinian territories, inasmuch as it is a direct violation of resolution 2334 (2016) and other resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, which reiterate that the establishment of settlements in Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, have no legal basis and represent a flagrant violation of international law and a major obstacle to achieving the two-State solution and a comprehensive, just and lasting peace.

We reiterate our full commitment to resolution 2334 (2016), on the illegality of Israeli settlements on Palestinian occupied territories, and we stress once again that the quarterly report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the resolution should be in written form, so as to afford us detailed knowledge of its implementation status, and that we should also be provided with up-to-date maps of all settlements on occupied Palestinian territories. We have consistently as Council members made this request here; so far it has not been heard or heeded.

Likewise, there are concerns about the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), because it provides humanitarian assistance to more than 5 million people and is currently experiencing a financial crisis that is jeopardizing its capacity to respond to the many pressing needs of refugees in the areas of health, education, safe drinking water, inter alia. We express our firm commitment to all international efforts geared towards a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Here we endorse initiatives such as the Quartet road map, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative and others, which serve as safeguards of a just and lasting peace that would enable both parties to live within recognized and secure borders.

We reiterate our conviction that the only long-term solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the two-State one, which would finally give rise to a free, sovereign and independent Palestinian State, within pre-1967 international borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

In closing, allow me to read out statements by two young Palestinians, Tarek and Ghanam, who were born in a Lebanese refugee camp.

(*spoke in English*)

Tarek said:

> "My religion is the freedom of all oppressed people, not only the Palestinian people. I want to know why the international courts never address what is happening in Palestine".

Ghanam said:

> "I would like my voice to be heard and to send a message to the world about Palestine and the Palestinian people, the people who are holding onto and carrying the history and identity of Palestine. I am living in a refugee camp in Lebanon, I was raised and lived off of humanitarian assistance, and I continue to survive at the mercy of international aid programmes. Our story, the story of the Palestinian people, is one of a human who has a home and his home was invaded and occupied by an outsider, an occupier.
>
> "We are a people that love freedom for the whole world, and we are against injustice anywhere. We are deprived of our basic human rights every day. I hope that the international community and the media will shed light on the Palestinian cause and suffering. UNRWA is reducing its services to the Palestinian refugees living in camps due to the lack of international support for the Agency. I wish freedom and justice to all oppressed people in the world".

(*spoke in Spanish*)

Let me conclude by responding to the representative of Israel, who asked what Bolivia would do. First of all, Bolivia would respect international humanitarian law. First of all, Bolivia would respect international human rights law. First of all, Bolivia would comply with all Security Council resolutions. However, I do not think that Bolivia would ever find itself in that situation, because we would never use violence in order to occupy land that belongs to another people. Bolivia would blockade others in the way that Israel isolates the population in Gaza. We hope that the Council can

be useful in resolving the very protracted, regrettable, tragic and unjust issue of Palestine.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): We align ourselves with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union later today.

I would like to start by thanking the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Mladenov, for his briefing to the Security Council and for his tireless efforts, including most recently to de-escalate the situation in Gaza. In today's challenging times, the strong presence and engagement of the United Nations in Gaza is of paramount importance, and we fully support Mr. Mladenov's efforts.

Over the past few weeks, we have witnessed the tragic events in Gaza that have led to a regrettable loss of life. Since the beginning of the events on 30 March, 34 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli security forces and thousands have been wounded. Israeli security forces have used live ammunition, including when shooting at children. Like the six United Nations Special Rapporteurs mandated by the Human Rights Council, Sweden condemns the killings and expresses its condolences.

Israel has the right to protect itself and its people within its borders, but measures taken must always be proportional. The lethal use of force should be used only as a last resort. Such incidents raise serious concerns about their compatibility with international law and must be swiftly and fully investigated. We support the Secretary-General's call for an independent and transparent investigation.

We continue to urge Israeli security forces to refrain from the use of force against unarmed protesters and representatives of the media and to respect the right to peaceful protest. We also stress that it is imperative that all actors, including those who organize demonstrations, put the protection of children first and never make children the target of violence, put them at risk of violence or encourage them to participate in violence.

Such deplorable events do not take place in a vacuum. Gaza — roughly half the size of New York City — is on the verge of social and economic collapse. Earlier today we heard Mr. Mladenov explain that Gaza is coming apart as we speak, with very dire consequences. We have the collective responsibility to avoid a humanitarian disaster and further escalation of violence in a very volatile region. There is an urgent need for changes on the ground, and all actors have responsibilities in that regard.

While understanding the legitimate security concerns of Israel, Palestine and Egypt, restrictions must be lifted and full and sustained access and movement guaranteed. That includes an immediate end to the Israeli policy of closure, which hampers reconstruction and makes economic development impossible. We underline the need for unimpeded access to Gaza for humanitarian actors, which is far from being the case today. Furthermore, Gaza constitutes an integral part of the State of Palestine, and the Palestinian Authority must resume its responsibilities in Gaza. We call on Palestinian factions to redouble their efforts to achieve reconciliation. Only reconciliation will lead to a unified Palestinian leadership and the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

As others have done today, I wish to highlight the difficult financial crisis of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNWRA). We must all support UNRWA, financially and politically, to avoid additional severe humanitarian consequences for the people of Gaza. It is of the utmost importance that all members of the international community meet their political and financial responsibilities.

We are heading into a historically charged period in mid-May, with important reference points for both Israelis and Palestinians. It has been 70 years since Israel declared independence, on 14 May 1948. Sweden was among the first wave of States that recognized the State of Israel, in February 1949. We have a long history of friendship with Israel. We must also acknowledge that the birth of one State, while being a joy to many, brought suffering for others. The Israeli declaration of independence coincides with the Palestinian exodus, also referred to as the Nakba, when hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forced to leave their homes.

In 1947, Sweden voted in favour of General Assembly resolution 181 (II), which recommended the creation of independent Arab and Jewish States, aimed at fulfilling the national aspirations of both peoples. While the establishment of the State of Israel led to the fulfilment of its legitimate national aspirations, those

of the Palestinian people — a people living under more than 50 years of occupation — are yet to be realized.

The events in mid-May will also coincide with the planned move of the United States Embassy to Jerusalem. The position of Sweden and of the whole European Union on the status of Jerusalem as a final status issue and as the future capital of both States, including the location of diplomatic representations, is clear and will remain unchanged.

With the current violence on the ground and the upcoming period, we see a real risk that the situation could spiral out of control. All parties must exercise maximum restraint and avoid confrontation. All parties must take immediate steps to de-escalate. The Council should contribute to those efforts, including through an appropriate public announcement.

While that must be our immediate priority, we must also drastically increase our multilateral efforts to advance peace. We must see the resumption of meaningful negotiations on all final-status issues leading to the two-State solution. President Abbas' plans for an international conference with a view to establishig a multilateral mechanism for peace is well worth exploring. It is critical that any future peace proposal have the ultimate goal of a two-State solution and that all final status issues are resolved based on international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), and previous agreements.

Let me just make a few brief remarks on Lebanon, where we welcome the holding of legislative elections on 6 May. It is the first time in nearly a decade for such elections, which constitute a milestone in Lebanon's democratic tradition. More broadly, the elections are vital for preserving the legitimacy of Lebanese State institutions. We hope that a new Government can be formed swiftly following the elections. We also hope that more women will be elected to the next Parliament and serve in the next Government. We reiterate our full support for Lebanon's stability, security, sovereignty and political independence.

Lastly, in response to the Israeli Ambassador who, regrettably, has already left, we share the view expressed by the United Kingdom and others with regard to the virtue of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran, as endorsed by the Council and as a means to maintain international stability and resolve the nuclear issue with Iran.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Peru.

Peru welcomes the holding of today's quarterly open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. We thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his important briefing.

Peru is deeply concerned about increasing instability in the region and the escalating violence observed over the past few weeks in the Gaza Strip, which has left many dead and wounded. We deplore the most recent wave of escalating violence and extend our deepest sympathy. In line with the remarks of Secretary-General António Guterres, we believe that an independent and transparent investigation is required in order to determine those responsible for the most recent tragedy.

Peru recognizes the freedom of expression and association of the Palestinian people and underscores that all protests must be peaceful in order to prevent further escalation. Peru also recognizes Israel's right to respond to acts that may pose a threat to its security and underscores that the right to legitimate defence must be exercised in line with the principles of proportionality, precaution and legality. We believe that the violence witnessed over the past few weeks again demonstrates the urgent need to address its root causes, in particular with regard to the gradual deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza. In that regard, we welcome the generous support provided through various regional initiatives that support the urgent proposal to provide stable and predictable funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

Peru also considers it urgent that the Israeli and Palestinian sides, with the support of the international community, resume negotiations towards a two-State solution, with secure and mutually recognized borders. We therefore once again express our concern over settlement practices, demolitions and evictions in the occupied Palestinian territories, including legislative initiatives that contravene resolution 2334 (2016). We recall that such practices run contrary to international law, seriously jeopardize the territorial integrity of the State of Palestine and undermine the chances of achieving a two-State solution.

We would like to conclude by encouraging the political, religious and social authorities and

leaders of both Palestine and Israel to always act with responsibility, prudence and moderation, and to encourage the resumption of a reasonable dialogue that will allow their respective peoples to move towards sustainable peace. We believe that this would be particularly important in the current context of growing instability in the Middle East, which is manifested with particular gravity in the conflicts and humanitarian crises in Syria and Yemen, among other instances of regional tension.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber. I wish to inform all concerned that we will be carrying on this open debate right through the lunch hour, as we have a large number of speakers.

I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Ms. Mudallali (Lebanon): I would like to congratulate Peru on a successful presidency of the Security Council this month. I would also like to thank Mr. Mladenov for his important briefing.

We meet at a perilous time in the Middle East. The Secretary-General, Mr. Guterres, described the situation as chaos and a threat to peace and security. The gaps are huge, and the shattered hopes should intensify our determination to sustain peace.

The Palestinian question and support for the Palestinian people and their legitimate rights remain a central tenet of the Arab consensus. That was reaffirmed at the summit held in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, in mid-April when Arab leaders, once again, emphasized their support for the right of the State of Palestine to its sovereignty over all the occupied Palestinian territories since 1967, including East Jerusalem. Jerusalem took centre stage in the summit, and the Arab leaders unanimously condemned and rejected the decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, as they rejected moving the United States Embassy to Jerusalem.

In the meantime, the peaceful demonstrations by civilian Palestinians in Gaza were met by Israeli bullets, and led to the death of dozens of Palestinians and injured thousands. Lebanon added its voice to the voice of the Arab leaders and the rest of the world in condemning the killing of innocent civilians and called for an international investigation commission to prosecute those responsible for those crimes.

Despite the situation, the Arab world is still committed to solving the conflict peacefully. The Arab leaders, at their summit, including Lebanon, reaffirmed their commitment to peace as a strategic option. They called for resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict on the basis of the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, ending the occupation and returning to the 1967 borders. The message remains that there is no alternative to the two-State solution based on all the relevant United Nations resolutions. How many innocent people should be killed, how many summits should be held and how many calls and condemnations should be enough for the Council to act and resume its role as the primary organ responsible for peace and security in the world?

There is consensus in Lebanon about a policy of disassociation towards the conflict in Syria. Nevertheless, because of the presence of over 1.2 million displaced persons in my country, Lebanon joins the international community in its call for a political solution to the Syrian conflict. It was only this week that the President of the Council of Ministers of Lebanon, His Excellency Mr. Saad Hariri, urged the international community to be more determined to find a solution in Syria and considered any delay harmful to the displaced Syrians, as well as to Lebanon.

In the midst of that regional turmoil, Lebanon remains steadfast in its efforts to preserve its stability through a series of steps. The Government was successful in holding three important conferences in partnership with Lebanon's friends. The Rome conference, hosted with the Italian Government's support in March, helped generate assistance for the Lebanese Armed Forces and security services. The conference in Paris under the auspices of the French presidency earlier this month brought about much-needed support for the Lebanese economy. Lastly, the Brussels conference, held this week, promised to bring invaluable help to Lebanon to withstand the burden of the displaced Syrians in the country, although the pledges fell below 15 per cent of the appeal.

Lebanon is very thankful for the generous support of its friends in the international community that understand the central role that Lebanon plays in the

stability of the region. Domestically, the Lebanese will go to the polls on 6 May to vote for a new Parliament. Those elections are very important because they strengthen the well-established democratic traditions in Lebanon and send a message about the importance of the ballot box in politics. But Lebanon is still facing serious challenges and threats to its security and stability, especially from the daily Israeli violations of its sovereignty by air, land and sea. Israel is still insisting on building a wall on occupied Lebanese territory and in disputed areas.

The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, through the tripartite mechanism, is trying to reduce tensions and resolve disputes on the ground. But that is not an alternative to the full implementation of United Nations resolutions that call for the full Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Lebanese territory and respect for its territorial and maritime borders. Lebanon is committed to the complete implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) in its entirety, and expects the Council to shoulder its responsibility to bring Israel to do the same, and stop its threats to Lebanon.

The last two days witnessed hundreds of world leaders and representatives in this building talking about peacebuilding and sustaining peace. If there is anything they agreed on it was the importance of addressing the root causes of conflicts. There is no place that needs that more than my region. Ending the occupation in Palestine and withdrawing from the occupied Lebanese and Arab territories can go a long way towards bringing peace and stability to the Middle East. There is a need for peacemakers and honest brokers to start a peace process, and have the commitment and will to see it through. Only then can we have an open debate on the Middle East that does not dwell on conflict, bloodshed and despair, and delivers a hopeful message.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this open debate. I also thank the Special Coordinator, Mr. Mladenov, for his valuable briefing. Japan is deeply concerned about the deteriorating situation in Gaza since 30 March. We are appalled by the number of dead and wounded, which has increased with each passing week. We respect both the Palestinians' right to peaceful demonstrations and the Israelis' right to security. However, violence cannot be justified for any reason. It will never solve problems and will not change the behaviour of others.

Japan continues to call upon all parties to exercise maximum restraint. We also reiterate that international human rights law and humanitarian law must be fully observed. There is now a tangible risk of an escalation of tension on the ground that could lead to further casualties as we approach the middle of May. We must all seek ways to prevent that outcome. In that regard, the Secretary-General's call for an independent and transparent investigation should be swiftly implemented in a way that prevents further escalation and casualties.

Behind the current situation, there is a lack of hope for the Palestinian people. The humanitarian situation in Gaza is dire. The existing scarcity of electricity and water will more severely affect people in the summer. Continued settlement activities in the West Bank not only violate international law, but also deprive the Palestinian people of hope for a two-State solution.

The financial crisis of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNWRA) has caused increased anxiety for Palestinian refugees. These hopeless conditions are feeding radicalism and do not benefit either party. The Government of Japan is determined to do what it can to keep the hope for a peaceful future alive. Regarding UNRWA, I am happy to announce that, two days ago, Japan decided to provide $10 million in additional contributions. We are also ready to call for further cooperation with UNRWA by Asian countries at the forthcoming Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development. We hope the solidarity shown by the international community will help Palestinians find hope in these difficult times, and prevent them from being driven to radicalism.

In that context, I also would like to touch upon the Jericho Agro-Industrial Park. That industrial complex now creates tangible employment and provides Palestinian manufacturers and entrepreneurs with a glimpse of a positive future. We envision products made in the Park being exported through Jordan to the region and beyond in the years to come. The Corridor for Peace and Prosperity initiative has offered opportunities where Palestine, Israel, Jordan and Japan cooperate for the economic development of Palestine through regional cooperation. A ministerial meeting is expected to be held soon.

Japan believes that keeping hope and mutual trust alive through these efforts is essential, particularly when the political track is at a difficult juncture. Ultimately, though, the projects alone cannot achieve peace. We reiterate that lasting peace and security can be achieved only through negotiations between the parties. Japan calls upon both parties to take concrete steps towards renewed negotiations, leading to the peaceful co-existence of a viable Palestinian State and Israel with secure and recognized borders.

We will enhance our political engagement with both parties, including at the highest level. Japan continues to support a two-State solution that accommodates the aspirations of both sides, in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions and known parameters. The final status of Jerusalem should be resolved through negotiations based on the assumption that it will be the future capital of both States.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The occupation by Israel of Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territories, the displacement of peoples, the confiscation of land and settling strangers on it based on the conviction of a takfiri Zionist belief constitute terrorism beyond description. Worse than that, double standards have become characteristic of some Member States in the Security Council that claim to defend human rights, international law and the principles set out in the Charter of the United Nations. They call for hysterical meetings almost daily, on matters based on false intelligence information that they make up while pretending to forget the clear fact that Israel has been occupying Palestine, the Golan and parts of Lebanon for more than five decades.

Those countries, in particular the United States of America, have provided protection and immunity from accountability for Israel's continued violations of hundreds of resolutions calling on Israel to end its occupation of Arab territories and to withdraw to the 4 June 1967 border. That encourages Israel to commit the most heinous of crimes and terrorist acts, the most recent of which was the killing of scores of people and injuring thousands of Palestinian civilians who were protesting peacefully during last weeks on the annual Palestinian Land Day, stressing the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their lands.

The Syrian Arab Republic has maintained its principled position supporting the Palestinian people's right to self-determination, to establish an independent State on their entire national territory, with Jerusalem as its capital, and to ensure the right of refugees to return to their homes according to General Assembly resolution 194 (III), of 1948.

My delegation would like to strongly condemn the deliberate disregard by the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process of a main part of his mandate. Once again, he did not touch on the situation of the occupied Syrian Golan, or the continuing Israeli practices and violations there, even though those practices fall within the item under discussion today. They are an integral part of his mandate as Special Coordinator for the Peace Process. Deviating from his mandate scores of times makes him incapable of assuming the responsibilities he has been assigned to handle.

Some countries have been attempting today to impose subjects that are not under discussion, in order to distract the Security Council from the practices of the Israeli occupation. They have not said a single word about putting an end to the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories and the occupied Syrian Golan. It is as if the restoration of the Golan is not the right of the Syrian people, and as if the Golan were not an occupied Syrian territory. Why do those delegations not speak about fighting terrorism, about human rights law and International humanitarian law when it comes to detaining Syrian people and putting them in Israeli jails in an arbitrary manner? For example, Sidqi Al-Maqt, the Mandela of Syria, was detained and imprisoned for merely documenting Israel's cooperation in the Syrian Golan with Da'esh and the Al-Nusra Front gangs in the disengagement area in Golan. Where is their rejection of stealing Golan natural resources, including gas, oil and water? Where is their rejection of the New Jersey-based company Genie Energy? That company, which is owned by a number of former United States officials, is digging for oil in the occupied Syrian Golan in violation of international law and the Fourth Geneva Convention. Where is their condemnation of the repeated aggression by Israel against my country, Syria, in support of terrorist groups? The latest was on 9 April. Of course, none of that has been reported to the Special Coordinator for the Peace Process.

We underscore that Syria has a sovereign right to 4 June 1967 border in the occupied Syrian Golan. It is

a non-negotiable right. Our occupied territories and our usurped rights should be returned in full to us, the rightful holders. Israeli settlers must leave our occupied territory in Golan sooner or later. My country calls on the Security Council to take immediate measures against Israel, the occupying Power, to put an end to its acts of aggressions and violations, and to put an end to the occupation of Arab territories, including the occupied Syrian Golan. It must withdraw to 4 June 1967 borders, in accordance with resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 497 (1981), and the establishment of the Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Moualimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me, at the outset, to congratulate you, Mr. President, upon your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I wish you every success in your work.

I would like also to express my sincere condolences to Côte d'Ivoire on the passing of our colleague Mr. Bernard Tanoh-Boutchoue, Permanent Representative of Côte d'Ivoire, and to wish his family patience and solace.

Alaa Zamli, Hussein Madi and Mohammed Ayoub were all 14-year-old boys. They were in the flower of their youth. Another 40 children like them were singing patriotic songs that included the following lyrics:

> "Return is a right like the sun that rises in our hearts and minds;
>
> "The ray of justice will lead us to Palestine and Jerusalem".

The ray of justice is guaranteed by international resolutions and charters. The ray of justice that those boys never saw because of bullets fired at them and at their friends by the occupation soldiers of the occupation forces in cold blood, without a semblance of human conscience. The Palestinians have claimed nothing other than the right to life, the right to return to their lands, which they were forced to leave, the right to self-determination and establishing their independent State with Jerusalem as its capital and the right to demand that the Security Council enforces its resolutions pertaining to the protection of the Palestinian people, in particular resolutions 605 (1987) and 904 (1994).

We call for the establishment of an international investigative commission to shed light on the events of 30 March and thereafter, and to hold Israel accountable for the murder of unarmed civilian protesters, and let the perpetrators of those crimes be subjected to deterring.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia emphasizes the centrality of the Palestinian cause in relation to the Arab nation, as well as the importance of the Arab identity of Jerusalem, the right of the State of Palestine to govern all its territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, and the urgent need for Israel to withdraw from all occupied Arab territories, including the Syrian Arab Golan. Saudi Arabia also underscores its strategic preference for peace and the need to settle the Israeli-Arab conflict in accordance with the Arabic Peace Initiative, introduced by my country in 2002. King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, reiterated his firm stance on that unchanged and principled position, when he announced at the twenty ninth Arab Summit, held recently in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia that

> "the Palestinian question is our first cause, and would remain our first cause until the Palestinian people enjoy all their legitimate rights, in particular the establishment of their independent State with east Jerusalem as its capital".

Iran continues to interfere in the internal affairs of Arab States and foment, support and embrace terrorism. Iran provides the first line of support to Hizbullah — a terrorist group that flaunts its arrogance and dominance in Lebanon, wages war in Syria and perpetrates the most extreme killings, siege and ethnic cleansing. Iran is supporting the Houthi militias in Yemen and providing them with arms and missiles that are, in turn, fired against my country. The number of missiles launched so far against Saudi Arabia has reached 125.

Independent United Nations reports have demonstrated that the missiles fired against my country were manufactured in Iran. The final report of Panel of Experts on Yemen found that,

> "the Islamic Republic of Iran is in non-compliance with paragraph 14 of resolution 2216 (2015) in that it failed to take the necessary measures to prevent the direct or indirect supply, sale or transfer of [arms to the Houthis]" (*S/2018/68, p. 2*)

In the most recent report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015), published following the Secretariat's visit to Saudi Arabia, he indicated that,

> "The Secretariat also observed three actuators that bore the castings of a logo similar to that of the Shahid Bagheri Industrial Group, an entity on the list maintained pursuant to resolution 2231 (2015) and a subordinate to the Aerospace Industries Organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran." (*S/2017/1030, para. 29*)

According to those reports, Iran is flagrantly violating resolutions 2216 (2015) and 2231 (2015). It is high time that the Council take a firm stand with regard to Iran and urge the international community to avoid complacency in the face of those acts of aggression and terrorism, which are undermining regional and international peace and security. It is also high time to deal with Hizbullah seriously and lift the lid off its terrorist operations in Syria, Lebanon and other parts of the world, and combat the flow of illegal arms into Hizbullah's hands and its practices, which run contrary to the Lebanese Constitution.

With regard to Syria, Saudi Arabia condemns the horrific chemical-weapon attack perpetrated by the Syrian regime in Douma in eastern Ghouta, which led to the deaths of dozens of innocent women and children. That crime demonstrates that the Syrian authorities have not discontinued the use of chemical weapons against civilians in Syria. Such a crime calls for a serious response and firm stance on the part of the international community to end the human suffering and ensure that the perpetrators be held accountable and punished.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia once again calls for delivering immediate humanitarian assistance to those in need throughout Syria regardless of their race, religion or political affiliation. It is necessary that all those detained and kidnapped be liberated. It is also critical that all refugees and displaced persons be allowed to return to their homes with dignity.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has expressed that it is keen to provide its assistance to the brotherly people of Syria to alleviate their suffering. Accordingly, my country announced its pledge of $100 million at the donor conference held in Brussels from 24 to 25 April in support of Syria. That brings the total amount of aid that Saudi Arabia has provided to its Syrian brothers in Syria and in neighbouring countries to almost $1 billion to date.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia reaffirms the need to end the tragedy experienced by the Syrian people. It is crucial that we move towards a peaceful solution based on the first Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015). The international community must meet its obligations with regard to the protection of civilians in Syria. The optimal solution to the crisis is indeed through consensus among Syrians and an agreement that meets the needs of the people, ends their suffering and meets their aspirations for freedom, stability and prosperity.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Tunisia.

Mr. Khiari (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, on behalf of the Group of Arab States, I thank you, Sir, for convening this important meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. The Group of Arab States would also like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing.

More than 70 years have passed since the establishment of the United Nations, and since then the Palestinian people have been living under occupation and suffering from all forms of Israeli violations, which have affected generations of Palestinians, in flagrant violation of international treaties and conventions and in defiance of relevant United Nations resolutions.

We are firmly committed to the Charter of the United Nations and to international law and international legitimacy, as they form the basis of international relations. In the light of the Israeli occupation authorities' flagrant and wanton aggression against those principles, and the continued brutal occupation of the Palestinian territories, we stress the importance of maintaining a unified international position that rejects Israel's status quo policy and of supporting the United Nations and the principles set out in its Charter, as well as supporting the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and establishing their independent state across 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

At the most recent meeting of the League of Arab States, held in Saudi Arabia on 15 April, Arab leaders, in accordance with their belief in the role of the United Nations, international law and international legitimacy and with a view to bringing about peace in the Middle

East as a strategic option, underscored a number of points, including the following.

First, it is important for there to be comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East as an Arab strategic option within the Arab peace process, which continues to be the more comprehensive plan to address all final status issues, most important of which are those of refugees and security in the region.

Secondly, the Arab leaders stressed the centrality of the Palestinian cause for all Arab nations and the Arab identity of occupied East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine.

Thirdly, they stressed that East Jerusalem will remain the capital of Arab Palestine, and called on States of the world to not recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel or to move their capitals there or take any measures that would alter the legal and political nature and character of Jerusalem, as that would have repercussions in the Middle East at large.

Fourthly, they stressed the importance of relaunching serious and effective Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations in order to overcome the impasse caused by the stringent Israeli positions. The negotiations should be time bound in order to bring the conflict to an end on the basis of a two-State solution. The Arab leaders supported the vision expressed by the Palestinian President for peace in his statement before the Council on 20 February (see S/PV.8183).

Fifthly, they rejected all unilateral Israeli steps aimed at changing the realities on the ground and undermining the two-State solution. They called on the international community to implement the resolutions of the international legitimacy, the most recent of which is resolution 2334 (2016), which condemns the settlements and confiscation of lands.

This meeting is being held at a time of tension as Israeli occupying authorities are seriously escalating their aggressions against the peace protesters in Palestine, especially in Gaza Strip. These painful incidents cause us to seriously request international protection for the defenceless Palestinian people.

We renew our condemnation of those acts of aggressions against the Palestinian people in the strongest possible terms. We reaffirm our full support for the call by the Secretary-General and many States to conduct a transparent and independent investigation into the fatal incidents related to the Great March of Return for the fourth week in a row. Pressure must be brought to bear on Israel to exercise restraint and refrain from using live ammunition against the Palestinian protesters while they commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the Nakba. All those violations and aggression exacerbate the humanitarian situation on the ground, in particular in the besieged Gaza and the camps. Basic relief services, including health and education, are threatened as a result of the ever-shrinking deficit in the budget of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNWRA) and the decline in financial allocations. We would like to thank donors for their support. We call on the international community to redouble its efforts to fill the financial gap and to ensure the financial sustainability of UNWRA, which would afford protection and a decent life to more than 5 million Palestinian refugees.

The international recognition of the State of Palestine enabled it to obtain observer status at the United Nations and to become a full member of a number of organizations and international treaties. The Group of Arab States seeks to promote the status of the State of Palestine internationally. It has stepped up its consultations with Member States and the Security Council with regard to the continued efforts to enable the State of Palestine to become a full Member of the United Nations in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

We strongly believe that we have no option other than to put an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestine and all other Arab territories. That is the only way to achieve peace in the region. We support all serious efforts and endeavours to revive the peace process and resume negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli sides on the basis of the two-State solution and in accordance with the international terms of reference, the resolutions of the Madrid Peace Conference and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Mr. Vale de Almeida: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its 28 member States. The candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania, as well as Ukraine, align themselves with this statement. A full version of my statement will be circulated. Allow me to make a few remarks.

Recent events in Gaza are a stark reminder of how volatile the situation on the ground can be in the absence of a clear political horizon. That is why, in past months, the European Union has consistently kept the Middle East peace process high on the political agenda, at a time when the region faces many other challenges.

Our overarching objective remains to restore a political horizon and an appropriate framework for political progress, together with our regional and international partners, starting with the Middle East Quartet. The European Union appreciates the United Nations role in that regard, including in particular the role played by the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Peace Process, Nikolay Mladenov.

The European Union remains fully committed to its known positions on parameters for a two-State solution, on the need to avoid any steps that are eroding the viability of the two-State solution, as laid down in the Quartet report of July 2016, including in particular continued Israeli settlement activity, which is illegal under international law and remains an obstacle to peace, as reaffirmed by resolution 2334 (2016), as well as incitement and violence.

The European Union has followed closely the recent protests and violence at the Gaza border fence. Over 30 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli live fire, including minors and journalists. Thousands have been injured. That raises serious questions about the proportionate use of force, which must be addressed through independent and transparent investigations. The European Union takes note of the fact-finding assessment mechanism established by the Israel Defence Forces to review its own actions and specific incidents that have taken place on the Israeli-Gaza border since 30 March. Facts must also be established regarding reports about violent attacks against Israel under the guise of the protests.

The most immediate priority for all sides must be to prevent any further escalation and loss of life. We call on all sides to act with utmost restraint and responsibility, while respecting the rights of freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. Israel must respect the right to peaceful protests and ensure the use of proportional measures when protecting its legitimate security interests. Those leading the protests and the de facto authorities in Gaza must avoid any incitement to violence, ensure that the protests remain strictly non-violent and not exploit them for other means. The situation in Gaza could have significant consequences for regional and international peace and security, as demonstrated by three conflicts over the past decade. Therefore, the Security Council must contribute to de-escalation efforts, including through an appropriate public expression.

The European Union has made important efforts, together with its partners, in recent months to improve the situation for the people in Gaza and support the return of the single legitimate Palestinian Authority to Gaza. The European Union co-chaired a donor conference for the Gaza desalination plant, which received pledges of €456 million, €77 million of which came from the European Union. The plant, which will address the human right to water in Gaza, will take some years to build, but some of its components will have an immediate positive impact.

The efforts of the international community in Gaza can bear fruit only if there is also responsible leadership on the ground. We expect all Palestinian factions to work together to address the needs of the Palestinian population. That will require a serious engagement in good faith, under Egyptian auspices, to implement the agreement of 12 October 2017, allowing the Palestinian Authority to resume its full responsibilities in Gaza. Gaza and the West Bank must be reunified under one single and legitimate Palestinian Authority. That is an important element for achieving the two-State solution and a viable and sovereign Palestinian State. All parties must take swift steps to produce a fundamental change in the political, security and economic situation in the Gaza Strip, in accordance with resolution 1860 (2009), including the end of the closure and a full opening of the crossing points, while addressing Israel's legitimate security concerns.

The European Union remains deeply concerned over recent significant reductions of funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which is facing its most difficult financial situation since its inception in 1949. That will have serious security and humanitarian consequences not only in Gaza, but also in the West Bank and neighbouring countries. The extraordinary Ministerial Conference held in Rome on 15 March, at the initiative of Sweden, Jordan and Egypt, was an important occasion to mobilize both political and financial support for the Agency and find ways to assure sustainable forms of financing for UNRWA. Collectively, the European Union and its member States

are among the largest contributors to the Agency, and that will continue. We call on all donors to continue or increase their support and on those that have cut funding to rethink their decision.

The European Union reiterates its support for Israel's legitimate right to exist, as well as Palestine's legitimate aspirations to statehood and sovereignty. In view of the upcoming events in mid-May and the risks of a flare up of tensions and violence on the ground, the priority must be to avoid further escalation and loss of life. We urge the parties to show restraint and avoid provocative rhetoric and acts that would risk fuelling further tensions. The European Union and its member States will continue to respect the international consensus on Jerusalem embodied in, inter alia, resolution 478 (1980), including on the location of their diplomatic representations, until the final status of Jerusalem is resolved.

Allow me to turn briefly to Syria, where the conflict has entered its eighth year.

We strongly condemn the repeated use of chemical weapons in Syria and their continued and repeated use by the regime, in violation of resolution 2118 (2013) and the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction, including the latest attack on Douma, which was a grave breach of international law and an affront to human decency. The EU fully supports the ongoing investigation by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OCPW) Fact-finding Mission into that devastating chemical attack. The EU reiterates its strong commitment to combatting the re-emergence of chemical weapons and is supportive of all efforts aimed at the prevention of the use of chemical weapons.

In that respect, the European Union deeply regrets the multiple Russian vetoes of the renewal of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism mandate in November 2017, and urges the Security Council to rapidly re-establish an independent attribution mechanism to ensure accountability for perpetrators of chemical weapons' attacks. We support the current efforts led by the Security Council to recreate dialogue and move forward on all tracks of the Syrian conflict.

The European Union held the second Brussels Conference on supporting the future of Syria and the region, co-chaired with the United Nations. We concluded on a strong message of broad international support for relaunching the political process, under United Nations auspices, in Geneva to solve the Syrian crisis, in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2254 (2015), and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). We reiterate that the European Union will be ready to assist in the reconstruction of Syria only when a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition, negotiated by the Syrian parties in the conflict on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué is firmly under way.

At the Brussels Conference, $4.4 billion were mobilized in support of operations to address both the worsening humanitarian situation inside Syria and the enormous needs of refugees and their hosts across the region this year, as well as multi-year pledges of $3.4 billion for the period 2019-2020.

In conclusion, the momentum of the current situation should be used to reinvigorate the process to find a political resolution to the Syrian conflict. The European Union repeats that any sustainable solution to the conflict requires a genuine political transition, in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué, negotiated by the Syrian parties within the United Nations-led Geneva process, and we remain committed to the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian State. In that context, the European Union commends the tireless efforts of the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, to facilitate the implementation of all relevant resolutions. The European Union will spare no efforts in support of a peaceful solution to the Syrian conflict.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. Duque Estrada Meyer (Brazil): At the outset, I would like to express my deep condolences to the delegation of Côte d'Ivoire. Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue attended the Brazilian Diplomatic Academy, and we were both in the same class. He was a very dear friend and colleague, and we will miss him.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

I wish to thank the Peruvian mission for convening this open debate. We believe that the United Nations as a whole and the Security Council in particular have a pivotal role to play in seeking solutions to the complex and prolonged conflicts that affect the Middle East.

Once again, Brazil wishes to express its full support for implementing a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with Palestine and Israel living side by side in peace and security, within mutually agreed and internationally recognized borders based on the 1967 borders and in accordance with international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the parameters of the peace process. Moreover, the Brazilian Government reaffirms its understanding that the final status of the city of Jerusalem must be defined through negotiations between Israel and Palestine based on the relevant Council resolutions, particularly resolutions 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016).

Brazil is following the situation in the Gaza Strip with concern, against the backdrop of the demonstrations of recent weeks. We reiterate our conviction that civilians should be able to exercise their right to demonstrate peacefully. The recent escalation has caused many deaths and unnecessary injuries, including among young people. We call on the parties to refrain from any act that could put more civilians in danger.

Recent developments in Syria continue to demand the urgent attention of the Security Council. The Brazilian Government expresses its great concern over the escalation of the conflict in recent weeks, and once again condemns the use of chemical weapons. We reaffirm that it is imperative to conduct thorough and impartial investigations into all allegations of chemical attacks and that, if confirmed, those responsible must be brought to justice.

Emerging from the conflict in Syria, however, will require full respect for international law. In that context, Brazil reiterates its belief that the conflict can be brought to an end only through political means through negotiations, under the auspices of the United Nations, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, especially resolution 2254 (2015). We reiterate our full support for the efforts of Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and the political negotiations in Geneva. The international community must send an unequivocal message in support of an inclusive political solution to the crisis in Syria. We are also deeply concerned about the situation in northern Syria and the violence in Idlib and Afrin. We call on all relevant parties to respect international law.

In Yemen, we are currently witnessing one of the most serious humanitarian disasters in the world. We deeply regret the recent escalation of hostilities and all violations of international law and international humanitarian law arising from conflict. We reiterate that the only way to end the Yemeni conflict and address the humanitarian crisis is a negotiated political solution through an inclusive dialogue.

In that regard, we reaffirm our full support for the work of Special Envoy Martin Griffiths. We welcomed his early contacts with the parties to the conflict with attention and optimism, and we wish to offer our strongest support for his proposal to resume the negotiations, based on parameters that will be defined in the coming months. We call on all parties to work with the Special Envoy and to return to the negotiating table without preconditions. We also reiterate the need to respect resolution 2216 (2015) on the arms embargo on Yemen, and we urge all Member States to observe its provisions.

In conclusion, Brazil reiterates its adamant support for the efforts of the Government and the people of Lebanon towards stability and development. In that context, we underline the vital role played by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and its Maritime Task Force in stabilizing a highly volatile environment. Brazil is proud to lead the Maritime Task force, at its helm since 2011.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Pahad (South Africa): We thank you, Mr. President, for convening this crucial open debate focusing on the situation between Palestine and Israel.

The unresolved matter of Palestine is nothing less than a gaping wound in the international political landscape — one that the Council has failed to adequately address for over 70 years. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is as old as the Organization, and it therefore deserves to be a top priority of this organ. The resolution of that long-standing conflict will contribute to the stability of the region. However, the recent events in Gaza can be seen as symptomatic of the lack of will and commitment to a political process for the resolution of the conflict. We therefore urge the Security Council to redouble its efforts towards minimizing the internal differences that have long made it impossible for the Council to shoulder its charter responsibility with regard to this matter.

Every year that goes by appears to make peace even more elusive. New generations of Israelis and Palestinians grow up knowing nothing but the conflict between themselves. In all this time, new challenges, as we have seen recently with the developments pertaining to the status of Jerusalem, Israeli illegal settlement activity and the recent events in Gaza, have compounded the crisis.

South Africa is deeply concerned by the excessive use of force by the Israeli military on the frustrated people of Gaza who were protesting the blockade imposed on their territory. As the conflict continues and their political and humanitarian situation worsens, the Palestinian people feel a constant existential threat as a metaphorical and literal wall closes in around them. It can only be expected that they would want to resist such a constant threat and have their voices heard. While those voices continue to be ignored, the parameters of what we have come to accept as a two-State solution are beginning to dwindle. Indeed, a peace process that is stagnant without any progress gradually loses the trust of the people who depend so desperately upon it. That loss of trust will be the death knell for the prospects of peace in the region.

It is frightening to imagine the alternative to a political solution to the conflict. While the occupation of Palestine continues, there will continue to be resistance and the entrenchment of hatred between peoples who have a shared history and have the potential to be peaceful neighbours, benefiting from mutual support and cooperation.

Today, during the centenary year of the birth of late President Nelson Mandela, we must draw on his legacy and those of countless other leaders in our own country, which have resulted in South Africa benefiting from the reconciliation of its people and overcoming entrenched divisions among people. With that in mind, South Africa supports all initiatives towards a negotiated solution to the crisis, including the recent proposal by the President of the State of Palestine, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, to convene an international summit to pursue a means of salvaging the two-State solution.

South Africa reaffirms that the central responsibility for attaining peace is primarily in the hands of the Palestinians and Israelis themselves. We, as part of the international community, should support and encourage the parties towards that endeavour. The international legal framework for those negotiations has already been set. Those include the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Plan and the Quartet road map, to name a few. Unilateral action, particularly on final-status issues, undermines the revival of a peace process. Those include the building of illegal settlements and the recognition by some Member States of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

Before I conclude, there are two additional issues of concern that we wish to raise.

The first issue is the plight of children in military detention in Israel. While the immediate injustice of those abuses cannot be overstated, it is the psychological and developmental harm to those young individuals that is most troubling. Furthermore, such abuses merely seek to reinforce hatred between the two sides to the conflict, prolonging the crisis and doing nothing to reconcile the parties.

The second issue is the dire financial situation faced by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The continued generous support of the international community is necessary to ensure the Agency's continuity of services, and is especially needed in light of the recurrent and severe financial shortfalls that continue to affect its programmes. We would like to emphasize that the funding for UNRWA should be sustainable, predictable and sufficient. For its part, South Africa will continue to support UNRWA through its financial contributions.

Finally, we believe that the commitment and good faith of all Council members are utterly essential if we are to mend the open wound that continues to harm generations of innocent people. We hope that these quarterly debates, which unfortunately have so far yielded no outcome or action, will very soon be converted into concrete and practical steps towards a political dialogue for a durable and sustainable resolution, with a negotiated solution based on the relevant United Nations resolutions. The resolution of the situation in Palestine will be the ultimate test of the ability of the United Nations to fulfil its central purpose of saving succeeding Palestinian and Israeli generations from the scourge of war. Israel will never have peace and security if the legitimate right to self-determination is not given to the Palestinian people.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the outset, I convey my delegation's appreciation to Peru for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, at this critical juncture for Palestine and the Middle East.

I align myself with the statement to be made by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic Venezuela, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is at the core of and central to all conflicts in the Middle East. That injustice has continued for more than seven decades and has intensified through the Israeli expansionist, aggressive and apartheid policies towards Palestinians and the region. No political theatre by the United States and the Israeli regime can cover up the aggressive and expansionist policies of that regime and its behaviour towards its neighbours as the main source of threat to the peace and security of the region. While Palestinian territories and the Syrian Golan Heights remain under illegal Israeli occupation, the Minister of Regional Cooperation of that regime boasts that Israel has carried out more than 100 strikes on Syria and Lebanon, all of which played directly into the hands of terrorists when and where they needed them.

Each time we meet in this Chamber, we receive news regarding illegal settlements or aggressive policies implemented by the apartheid Zionist regime. The Israeli regime now works day and night to negate all rights of the Palestinians and to entrench its occupation. Indeed, Israel is a rogue regime, by definition. That is an undeniable fact for the international community, except for those who believe that illegal occupation, illegal settlements, apartheid, sieges, regular attacks and mass murder are the legitimate actions of a regime that proclaims itself to be the only democracy in the Middle East.

As one prominent Palestinian scholar said three decades ago, what is so extraordinary is that what the Israelis are now doing in the West Bank and Gaza is really a repetition of the experience of apartheid and what the United States did to the Native Americans, putting them in reservations or simply exterminating them in the hope that the problem would go away. Those words are more true today than ever.

As a result of the new and ongoing mass murder in Gaza, dozens of unarmed Palestinian civilians have been killed and thousands wounded so far. Those latest attacks conform to the pattern that has been followed by the Israeli regime during the course of the past seven decades. Given the circumstances, there is no doubt that those vicious attacks and killings are planned and deliberate. Those who support and enable the Israeli regime to commit those types of crimes also have the Palestinians' blood on their hands.

The unlawful announcement on Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the imminent transfer of the United States Embassy to that city are another example of the policies that are exacerbating the problems. Those measures gravely contravene international law and the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. The exceptionalism that has long been accorded to the Israeli regime must now end if the Council is serious about establishing peace and security in the Middle East. The impunity that the regime has enjoyed for so long would not have been possible without the help it receives from the United States and certain interest groups.

In conclusion, at a time when the Palestinian people are facing rising Israeli aggression, Iran reaffirms its long-standing solidarity with the Palestinian people, recognizing their decades of resilience despite so much suffering and injustice. Iran reiterates its strong support for their legitimate and inalienable rights, including to self-determination and freedom, in an independent and viable State of Palestine, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mr. Hattrem (Norway): Tensions are increasing in the Middle East, and it has become even more difficult to re-engage Israel and Palestine in a meaningful political process. It is therefore imperative to prepare the ground for political initiatives that can lead to renewed negotiations on a two-State solution.

Norway is deeply concerned about the violent clashes on the Gaza-Israeli border. We urge all parties to act with responsibility and restraint and to refrain from any actions that could lead to further escalation or loss of life. The use of lethal force against unarmed protesters who are demonstrating peacefully is unacceptable. While Israel has a legitimate right to protect its borders, any use of force must be necessary and proportionate.

It is also important to stress that freedom of expression and freedom of assembly are fundamental rights that must be respected. But protests must be non-violent. As we have already emphasized, the most serious incidents must be subject to an independent and credible investigation. This is first and foremost a national responsibility. However, Gaza can be sustainable only as part of a comprehensive resolution to the conflict.

As chair of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC), Norway — together with the European Union, the United Nations and the United States — has intensified its work to support Palestinian institution-building and to address the precarious humanitarian situation in Gaza. We recently held two AHLC meetings in Brussels, on 31 January and 20 March, both of which aimed at improving the critical situation in Gaza. Key priorities are increased water and energy distribution and improved access and movement of people and goods in and out of Gaza, with special priority given to medical equipment and people in need of medical treatment.

Our goal must be to help the 2 million people in Gaza. Norway is actively consulting with the parties, Egypt and key international partners to address the current situation. The policies and decisions of the parties that run counter to the needs of the people of Gaza must stop. It is also imperative that the Palestinian Authority reinstate its full authority in Gaza. The Cairo agreement must be fully implemented and the closure of Gaza must be eased.

Following chemical attacks in Syria, it is crucial that the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons inspectors have unhindered access so that they can continue their investigations. We also urge the Security Council to establish a mechanism to hold those responsible to account.

Norway is deeply concerned about the recent escalations of violence in Syria. We underline the need for renewed efforts to find political solutions. It is important that all the parties involved in the conflict work through the United Nations-led negotiations to achieve a durable peace.

Yesterday, at the Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region, the donors pledged $4.4 billion for 2018. While this confirms the international commitment to easing the burden of the Syrian people, the pledges made are less than half of what the United Nations estimates is needed. Norway is on track to fulfil our four-year pledge of over $1 billion, and this year we will contribute $280 million to the crisis in Syria, including neighbouring countries.

Norway fully supports the Iran nuclear deal. When it was signed in 2015, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was a milestone for international peace and security. Iran has complied with its commitments under the deal. It is now crucial to ensure that the JCPOA survives. This means that all parties must remain committed to complying with both the letter and the spirit of the agreement.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Liechtenstein.

Mr. Wenaweser (Liechtenstein): I thank you, Sir, for this opportunity to discuss the situation in the Middle East. Escalations in different parts of the region and political paralysis in the Council make the participation of the entire membership in this debate particularly important.

The ongoing paralysis of the Security Council with respect to the situation in Syria is a reason for deep concern. No less than 12 vetoes have been cast on proposals before the Council to deal with the situation. Moreover, its rare decisions have been ineffective, such as the ceasefire mandated under resolution 2401 (2018), which continues to be disregarded by conflict parties. The conflict has turned from an internal armed conflict into a threat to the stability of the region and beyond. It continues to be characterized by massive violations of international humanitarian law, including the use of chemical weapons and large-scale displacement. Both the briefing we heard yesterday (see S/PV.8242) and the Brussels Conference have made it clear just how far we are from a political solution to this conflict.

Accountability must be an integral part of any peace process for Syria, as evidenced by the situation on the ground and called for consistently by Syrian civil society groups. We continue to strongly support the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, whose mandate encompasses crimes committed by all parties and, of course, the competence to investigate the use of chemical weapons which is, under all circumstances, a war

crime. The Mechanism will soon be fully operational and is already in a position to receive information and evidence. We call on all States to extend this type of cooperation to the Mechanism. We reiterate our view that the Council should refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court (ICC), as called for by the Secretary-General and supported yesterday at the Brussels Conference.

The peace process in the Middle East, having already been stalled for a considerable time, is now further jeopardized by recent developments in Gaza. We are deeply concerned by the recent violence, in particular the excessive use of force and extrajudicial killings by Israeli security forces. We support the call of the Secretary-General for an independent and transparent investigation and echo the ICC Prosecutor's reminder that the situation in Palestine remains under preliminary examination.

According to the principle of complementarity, the primary responsibility to investigate lies with the national judiciaries concerned, with a role for the Court to monitor such proceedings, which have to be conducted in conformity with relevant standards of international criminal law. We also closely follow discussions on possible action by the Human Rights Council in Geneva. Liechtenstein continues to support a two-State solution, within an international legal framework based on applicable international humanitarian law and relevant Security Council resolutions.

The catastrophic humanitarian crisis and the systematic disregard for international humanitarian law in Yemen remain alarming. It is crucial that humanitarian aid have unimpeded, sustained and safe access, as over 20 million people urgently require help. We welcome the Council's call for increased access for humanitarian aid to Yemen through sea and air ports. Nevertheless, we are concerned that hostilities on all sides continue and will lead to a further escalation of the situation. The Security Council must live up to its responsibility and protect civilians from the most serious crimes under international law, including the deliberate targeting of civilian populations and infrastructure. We support the new Special Envoy's initiative to recall inclusive peace talks. Council members, in particular those nine that have signed the code of conduct on mass atrocity crimes elaborated by the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group, should use their procedural majority in the Council to address the situation in Yemen.

One of the few positive developments in the recent past with respect to the situation in the Middle East was the conclusion of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), a highlight of multilateral diplomacy and a testimony to the effectiveness of the Council, which has endorsed that important agreement. We continue supporting the JCPOA and hope that its terms will be honoured by all parties.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Moncada (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to take the floor on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (NAM) at this quarterly open debate on a matter to which we have historically attached special importance, namely, the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, particularly at the current international juncture.

At the outset, we would like to express our appreciation to Mr. Nikolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his valuable briefing.

We are living in a world facing multiple, complex and newly emerging threats and challenges to international peace and security. We believe that these must be resolutely addressed through multilateralism in the framework of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, can be no exception. In that regard, we, the 120 States members of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, in accordance with the communiqué issued on 19 April, reaffirm the full validity of the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and reiterate our unwavering commitment to the peaceful resolution of disputes, in accordance with Article 2 and Chapter VI of the Charter of the United Nations, as well as with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 2625 (XXV) of 24 October 1970.

Many sombre anniversaries took place in 2017, and 2018 seems to be no different. This year marks the seventieth anniversary of the Nakba, the catastrophe and tragedy that befell the Palestinian people in 1948 when they lost their homeland under the Palestine Mandate and the majority of Palestinians were forcibly expelled or fled in fear. Uprooted from their cities,

towns and villages, dispossessed and displaced, they became refugees whose tragic plight continues until this day. We take this opportunity to once again call for the undertaking and intensification of all efforts required to bring an end to this injustice and advance a peaceful and just solution. We cannot allow the suffering of the heroic Palestinian people to continue.

In this regard, NAM reaffirms that the ongoing Israeli occupation, and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as a whole, continue to pose a serious threat to international peace and security. This requires urgent attention and action in accordance with international law, the relevant resolutions and, of course, the Charter of the United Nations itself. Moreover, the Security Council must uphold its duties in the framework of the Charter of the United Nations and act to uphold its own resolutions, which constitute the foundation for a peaceful, just and lasting solution to the conflict.

Furthermore, we reaffirm that all measures and actions taken or to be taken by Israel, the occupying Power — such as its illegal decision of 14 December 1981 aimed at altering the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan and its institutional structure, as well as Israel's measures to apply its jurisdiction and administration there — are null and void and have no legal effect. In this regard, and in line with our principled position, we demand once again that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and fully withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan to the lines of 4 June 1967, pursuant to resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

In relation to the Palestinian question, the States members of NAM remain ready to contribute to the achievement of a peaceful, just and lasting solution to the conflict. We therefore welcomed the peace proposal presented by President Mahmoud Abbas to the Security Council on 20 February (see S/PV.8183) and extend our support to his call for the early convening of an international peace conference.

In this vein, we call for the intensification of international and regional efforts in support of this objective, and recall the responsibilities of the Security Council and the General Assembly in this regard, as most recently reaffirmed in resolution 2334 (2016). We believe that this resolution provides the most viable path to peace, setting forth the essential requirements and parameters for a just solution that would preserve the two-State solution on basis of the pre-1967 lines, with respect for the long-standing terms of reference of peace endorsed by the international community and in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map. This shall ensure the realization by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights, including to self-determination and independence in their State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

We continue to call for the full respect and implementation of all relevant resolutions in this regard, which would establish the conditions necessary to bring an end the occupation, justly resolve the conflict in all its aspects and make Palestinian- Israeli peace and security a reality for the benefit of both peoples, the region and the international community as a whole. It is also imperative that action be taken immediately in line with international law and relevant resolutions in order to redress the situation on the ground, de-escalate tensions and foster a environment conducive to the pursuit of peace.

The situation in Gaza remains of great concern to the Movement, particularly the grave humanitarian situation which, regrettably, continues to deteriorate. NAM therefore reiterates its call for the total lifting of the Israeli blockade on the Gaza Strip, which continues to impose untold humanitarian, social and economic suffering on more than 2 million Palestinian children, women and men. We stress once again that the crisis in Gaza must be comprehensively addressed in accordance with international law, including humanitarian and human rights law and the relevant resolutions, in the context of the overall situation of the ongoing illegitimate and belligerent Israeli foreign occupation of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, since 1967, as well as in the context of the unequivocal calls for an end to the occupation of more than half a century.

The recent tragic events that have taken the lives of over 30 innocent Palestinians and injured more than 3,600 people in the Gaza Strip in under a month provide yet another reason to direct all efforts to achieve peace and find a peaceful resolution of the conflict, rather than its escalation. They are also another reason to put an end to the prolonged tragedy and suffering of the Palestinian people.

In this connection, the Nam condemns Israel's excessive and disproportionate use of force against

Palestinian civilians who participated in the Great March of Return, which is a peaceful civilian protest against Israel's illegal occupation, oppression and dispossession of the Palestinian people, who have endured such treatment for over 50 years. We call for international action — particularly on the part of the Security Council — to ensure accountability for and a cessation of the violations being committed by the occupying Power.

Moreover, the Movement welcomes the statements made by the international community, including by the Secretary-General, Governments, regional organizations and human rights organizations, reaffirming the right to peaceful protest and calling for independent and transparent investigations into the killings perpetrated by the Israeli occupying forces against Palestinian civilians participating in the peaceful protests.

As Israel has clearly renounced its obligation as the occupying Power to protect the civilian Palestinian population, in line with the Fourth Geneva Convention, the Movement urges the international community to ensure the protection of Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip and across the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, with a view to addressing the dire state of insecurity of the occupied population and prevent further loss of innocent human lives.

In this connection, the States members of the Movement express their grave concern over the lack of accountability for all the violations committed by Israel, which does nothing but foster impunity, further destabilize the situation on the ground and diminish peace prospects. We reaffirm the importance of ensuring that the occupying Power complies with its duties and responsibilities under international law. It would be alarming for a country with such a background to become a non-permanent member of this organ, which is entrusted with the maintenance of international peace and security and the implementation of its own resolutions.

To conclude, the Movement reaffirms its unwavering solidarity with the Palestinian people and its steadfast support for their just cause, and reiterates its commitment to further strengthening and coordinating international efforts to promote a just, lasting, comprehensive and peaceful solution to the Palestinian question in all its aspects. On the eve of the seventieth anniversary of the tragic Nakba, we further reaffirm our commitment to continuing to support the heroic Palestinian people in their quest to achieve justice and fulfil their inalienable rights and legitimate national aspirations, including their right to self-determination, freedom and independence in their State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital. Only a comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question will allow us to achieve the long sought-after peace in the Middle East region.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey): I do not know how many times we have come here and stated that the Palestinians have the right to live like the rest of us. They have the right to be free and secure, and they have the right to have what is their own, yet nothing is changing. The illegal occupation continues and the Palestinians are deprived of their basic rights.

The protracted stalemate in the peace process inflames tensions and gives way to new cycles of violence. Despite continuous international calls, Israeli violations in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, have been increasing at an alarming rate. The dramatic escalation of settlement activities, intended to create new realities on the ground, remains a major obstacle to peace. The measures aimed at altering the demographic composition and character of Jerusalem and unilateral decisions to that end threaten the possibility of coexistence. Jerusalem is a holy city for all three monotheistic religions. It is the responsibility of all humankind to preserve its historic status.

Inaction in the face of persistent non-compliance with international law and Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), further emboldens Israel's recklessness. What we have witnessed since the start of the Great March of Return is the latest example. We strongly condemn the disproportionate use of force by Israeli forces and deliberate attacks on defenceless Palestinians participating in the peaceful demonstrations to protest the denial of their inalienable rights and legitimate national aspirations. Israel must comply with its obligations under international human rights law and humanitarian law and respect the right to peaceful protest.

The international community — the Council in particular — cannot turn a blind eye to the blatant disregard of international law. It needs to take action

to stop the targeting of civilians, ensure independent and transparent investigations into the incidents, and implement its own resolutions.

The latest developments remind us once again of the urgency of revitalizing the peace process. A two-State solution, with the establishment of an independent State of Palestine along the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, remains the only way to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace that can also ensure security for both sides. Any peace plan or initiative should be based on the established parameters. Peace requires Israel to show political will and refrain from provocative and detrimental actions. It also requires the Palestinian side to act in unity, work towards national reconciliation and establish an inclusive Government.

The situation in Gaza, which is on the brink of collapse after a decade of blockade, continues to be deeply worrying. This tragedy is compounded by the worst financial crisis in the history of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). Until a just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is achieved, the work of UNRWA will remain vital. It is our collective and moral duty to support the Agency. In that understanding, we have announced an additional $10 million for the UNRWA programme budget and increased our in-kind donation. We also decided to pledge €11 million to the Gaza central desalination plant project. While our assistance to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinians will continue, we will spare no effort to contribute to a lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

We shall also pursue our efforts to calm the situation on the ground in Syria and to advance the political process. Turkey has also been actively contributing to the counter-terrorism and stabilization efforts in Syria. Operations that we have carried out, namely Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch, have cleared more than 4,000 square kilometres of terrorists. So far, 160,000 Syrians have voluntarily returned to the Euphrates Shield area. We expect a similar pattern of stabilization in and return to Afrin.

In the same spirit, have we stepped up our humanitarian efforts. From the beginning, we have been providing continuous humanitarian aid and fundamental health services to the region in order to prevent civilian suffering. We also have closely cooperated with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on how to best respond to changing circumstances. We are currently working on new United Nations cross-border humanitarian assistance shipments from Turkey to Afrin, with the first shipment having already been delivered in early April.

The United Nations-led Geneva process remains the main venue for finding a lasting political solution to the Syrian conflict, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). At the same time, the Astana format has proven to be an important international initiative to reduce violence, give impetus to political process and adopt confidence-building measures. This month in Istanbul, the Presidents of the Astana guarantor States reiterated what they underlined in their joint statement in November 2017: that the political solution to the conflict should be achieved through a Syrian-owned, Syrian-led process leading to a new constitution, as well as free and fair elections, under appropriate United Nations supervision.

In this understanding, the Sochi congress endorsed the 12 Living Intra-Syrian Essential Principles put forward by United Nations Special Envoy De Mistura and called for the establishment of a constitutional committee. This road map still constitutes a significant framework for efforts to achieve a political solution through the Geneva process. In this context, the Foreign Ministers of three guarantor States will continue their efforts to that end and elaborate on the next steps on 28 April in Moscow.

Before I conclude, I would like to emphasize that Turkey will continue to deploy all efforts to consolidate de-escalation on the ground, to advance the political process and to address the plight of the Syrian people.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations.

Monsignor Kassas (Holy See) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Holy See thanks the Peruvian presidency for holding this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

The situation in the Middle East continues to be a source of extreme concern in terms of its impact on international peace and security. This is clear due to the great space afforded to this issue by the Council during our debates over the past year on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Syrian crisis and other crises in the region.

The ongoing conflicts in the region have had negative impacts that threaten the stability of the

region as a whole and entailed grave consequences for international peace and security. The challenges of governance; the youth bulge and high rates of unemployment; the collapse of State institutions; the violation of human rights and international humanitarian law; sectarian strife; geopolitical rivalry; the threat of terrorism and violent extremism; the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, including the use of chemical weapons; a massive influx of refugees and migrants; and humanitarian crises are just some of the challenges faced by the region.

The humanitarian situation in Syria remains marked by unparalleled suffering, destruction and disregard for human life. As Pope Francis said last week, "there is no good war or bad war". He appealed to political and military leaders to choose another path — that of negotiations, which is the only path that can bring peace rather than death and destruction.

The lives of millions of Yemenis have been devastated by what the Secretary-General has rightly called a stupid war. The events in Yemen have been called the world's largest humanitarian catastrophe — one that is entirely man-made. The international community must pay much greater attention to this conflict, where civilians are paying a huge price in a senseless war that has been overshadowed by other conflicts in the region.

With regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Holy See joins the great majority of the delegations here today in reiterating its strong support for the two-State solution as the only viable way of fulfilling the aspirations for peaceful coexistence among Israelis and Palestinians alike. Every Israeli and Palestinian has the right to live in peace and security. What is needed now is a renewed commitment to negotiations towards a two-State solution. In order to have the best chance of success, peace talks must take place in an environment free from violence. The ongoing violence only underlines how overdue a just and lasting resolution is.

Concerning Jerusalem, the Holy See would like to recall once again the obligation of all nations to respect the historical status quo of the Holy City, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions. Only an internationally guaranteed status can preserve Jerusalem's unique character.

This bleak picture of the region leads my delegation to reiterate the appeal of Pope Francis, who, in considering the responsibility of the Security Council to seek a unified and effective response for a lasting peace in Syria and in other regions of the world, encouraged all those with political responsibility to ensure that justice and peace prevail. In this regard, the Security Council remains a key actor in making sure that all such efforts will be guided by the relevant international law. The sheer range and scope of the challenges that we face should galvanize all those who value peace and human rights to resolute action so that those most affected by conflict and insecurity will not be left behind.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Namibia.

Mr. Gertze (Namibia): We thank Peru, as President of the Security Council for the month of April, for organizing today's debate on the important topic of the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. I would also like to thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his comprehensive and detailed briefing.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Permanent Representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

In the lead-up to the seventieth anniversary of the 1948 war, which takes place on 15 May, the demonstrations of the Great March of Return are being held every Friday at the border fence between the Gaza Strip and Israel. This sustained campaign is focused on the return of those Palestinians expelled in 1948 to their country, Palestine. Since 30 March, at least 35 demonstrators have been killed and a large number have been wounded following the excessive and disproportionate use of force by Israel. On 5 April, the Secretary-General urged Israel to exercise caution in the use of force in order to avoid casualties. Civilians must be able to exercise their right to demonstrate peacefully. We fully support this statement of the Secretary-General.

Namibia reaffirms its support for General Assembly resolution 181 (II) of 1947 and Security Council resolution 242 (1967). Those and subsequent resolutions affirm Jerusalem as the capital of both the future Palestinian State and the State of Israel. The recognition by the United States Administration of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel alone therefore

contradicts the Council resolutions and clearly further complicates the prospect of a viable two-State solution.

On 26 March, in his fifth report to the Security Council on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), Special Coordinator Mladenov noted that, between December 2017 and March 2018, Israel had advanced 22 plans for some 1,500 housing units in Area C settlements and that around a dozen units had been approved for construction (see S/PV.8214). These settlements are illegal under international law and are a serious impediment to the peace process and to any realization of the two-State solution. The destruction of Palestinian homes and infrastructure in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, has also continued, albeit at a slower rate. From December 2017 to March 2018, 92 structures, including 15 that were donor-funded, were demolished. This destruction also represents an impediment to peace.

Namibia remains deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza. The electricity supply sees cuts of up to 20 hours a day. The dire situation is compounded by the recent funding cuts to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Through its 267 schools in Gaza, UNRWA provides education to 262,000 students. Each year, an average of 4 million patients visit UNRWA's 21 primary health-care facilities in Gaza.

As the conflict in Syria drags on into its eight year, we call on the Security Council to live up to its obligations pursuant to the Charter of the United Nations and to find a lasting solution that brings peace to Syria through peaceful means. Any unilateral action is incompatible with the Charter and risks undermining the effectiveness of the very institution created to resolve such crises. We urge Security Council members to remain united in pursuit of common justice, peace, security and stability through dialogue based on the principles of multilateralism.

To conclude, we once again call on the Israeli Government to end all construction of settlements and the destruction of Palestinian homes and infrastructure. We call for Israel's complete and unconditional withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and urge all parties to return to negotiations so that the Palestinian people can exercise their inalienable rights in an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital and as a rightful member of the United Nations and its specialized agencies.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to commend your efforts, Mr. President, during Peru's presidency of the Security Council this month, and we thank you for holding today's important debate. We also thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process for his briefing this morning.

There is agreement in the Council and in the world that achieving peace in the Middle East will help to overcome all the challenges facing the region, in particular the elimination of terrorism. Clearly, the world will then reap the fruits of peace, security and stability in the region. To achieve and promote peace in the Middle East, the current policies and violations of international law must be abandoned, since they undermine the efforts aimed at establishing a comprehensive peace in this vital region of the world. The implementation of international resolutions and the initiatives that seek to achieve that objective therefore provides a strong basis for the success of the international efforts.

The Israeli military escalation on the occasion of Earth Day, which led to the death and injury of many Palestinian civilians, undermined peace efforts and was a blatant violation of international norms. The State of Qatar reiterates its condemnation of such violations and calls on the international community and the Security Council to shoulder their responsibility to protect civilians.

Based on our conviction that settling the Palestinian question and achieving peace will serve both the Palestinians and the Israelis and will bring about gains for the region and the world, the State of Qatar continues to support all efforts to resume meaningful negotiations between the two parties in order to achieve peace within clear parameters and timetable. This would enable the two parties to live side by side in peace and security based on the two-State solution, establish a Palestinian State within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and respect the legal status of Jerusalem in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. This would also facilitate an end to the Israeli occupation of all occupied Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan, and the immediate and complete cessation of

settlement activities, lift the blockade on Gaza Strip, and allow for the return of refugees and the restoration of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

In response to the United Nations appeals to fill the gap in funding of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for its humanitarian projects and based on the United Nations resolutions that have affirmed that the international community has an obligation to support UNRWA, the State of Qatar contributed $50 million at the Extraordinary Ministerial Conference in support of UNRWA that was held last March in Rome.

The chemical attack against civilians in Douma, in eastern Ghouta, at the beginning of this month, revealed the risks of the ongoing Syrian crisis with respect to regional and international security, the magnitude of the suffering endured by the Syrian people and the inability of the international community to end the suffering, cease war crimes and crimes against humanity that are being perpetrated in Syria. The State of Qatar reiterates its condemnation in the strongest terms of this disgraceful act. It supports military operations of the United States, the United Kingdom and France against military targets used by the regime to launch attacks against innocent civilians. We reiterate our call upon the international community to uphold its responsibilities to end the aggression by the regime, stop the use of internationally banned weapons and bring the perpetrators of these crimes to international justice. We emphasize once again our support for all the efforts aimed at a political resolution of the conflict based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and the relevant Security Council resolutions, in a manner that fulfils the aspirations of the Syrian people who yearn for security and stability and the unity of Syria at the national and regional levels.

We will also continue to work with our partners to alleviate the impact of the humanitarian crisis. In this regard, I would mention the State of Qatar's new pledge of $100 million this year, announced yesterday by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Minister at the Brussels conference on supporting Syria and the region. This comes in addition to our ample past contributions in support of the Syrian people.

In the light of the highly tense international environment and challenges as a result of continued conflicts, terrorism and the slow pace in resolving conflicts, and at a time when the challenges in the Middle East must be faced with cooperation by all, the continued fabricated crisis against the State of Qatar is negatively affecting security and stability of the region. The continued unjust blockade and arbitrary unilateral measures imposed against my country without any justification or legal basis, which will soon enter their second year, reveal the narrow interests they aim to achieve. They contradict international law, the multilateral international order, friendly relations and human rights. They also have grave effects on regional and international cooperation in terms of maintaining international peace and security.

The serious implications of this fabricated crisis against the State of Qatar in the Middle East and its direct impact on efforts of the Security Council in the area of maintaining international peace and security require immediate lifting of the blockade, ending the arbitrary unilateral actions against the State of Qatar and initiating dialogue as a means to resolve disputes in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. The State of Qatar has called for this since the start of the crisis, based on its responsibility as a State Member of the United Nations and as a major partner within the international community in efforts to address common challenges. We appreciate the valued mediation of His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of the State of Kuwait, and we express gratitude to all States that have supported the mediation to resolve the crisis.

In conclusion, the State of Qatar will continue its active and positive contributions to achieve peace in the Middle East. We will harness all the legal means to reach solutions for conflicts and crises in the region and work in a manner to achieve the Security Council's objectives in the maintenance of international peace and security.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): I would like to start by thanking the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General for his incisive briefing.

Speaking in this Chamber a few days ago, Secretary-General António Guterres sounded the warning that the Cold War had returned with a vengeance across a multiplicity of divides, including in the Middle East (see S/PV.8231). Moreover, he observed that this new Cold War was under way without the mechanisms and

safeguards used to manage the risk of escalation in the past. Big Power rivalries combined with the divergent policies and interests of major regional States presage a period of continued conflict and instability in the region, contributing to the suffering of the millions of innocent victims of the regional conflicts and the rising danger of major international conflagration.

In recent times, no people have suffered greater injustice than the people of Palestine. During the past 70 years, they have been driven from their homes and their homeland, militarily occupied and obligated to living conditions that resemble apartheid. The world witnessed the latest manifestation of Israel's cruel occupation and repression during the Great March of Return in Gaza. A peaceful protest was transformed into a callous killing zone by the occupying Power even as the world watched the wanton shooting of unarmed Palestinians on their television screens.

While the Palestinians mourned the pointless murder of scores of their men, women and children, some as young as 14, the Security Council was unable to even call for an independent and transparent investigation into the incidents, much less condemn the crimes of the occupying Power. The Palestinian demand for justice was met once again by arrogant dismissal. International peace and stability cannot be promoted by denying freedom and justice to peoples living under foreign or alien occupation. The international community has long since recognized that peace between Israel and the Palestinian people and other Arab and Muslim peoples can only be built through a two-State solution. An illusory one State will perpetuate occupation and conflict and provide neither peace nor security.

Pakistan also deplores the constraints placed on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). It is deplorable that the suffering of Palestinian refugees is sought to be mortgaged to political ambitions. Sufficient, predictable and sustainable financing of UNRWA's activities is essential, moral and legal, all the more so at this grim political juncture when prospects for the negotiated settlement appear so sombre and so bleak.

We have heard some characterize the Middle East as a troubled place. The Council should analyse the reasons for the region's troubles. Most of these troubles are a direct consequence of foreign occupation, annexation and intervention. The region stands at a dangerous crossroads. The seething fires of conflict and violence threaten to exacerbate the multiple intersecting and overlapping regional fault lines, thus presenting a greater risk to international peace and security than ever before.

We are gravely concerned by reports of the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria. Any use of chemical weapons by anyone anywhere is abhorrent and illegal and deserves unreserved condemnation. We welcome the deployment of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons Fact-finding Mission to the Syrian Arab Republic and are confident that its investigations will assist in establishing and ascertaining the facts. At the same time, we reiterate our call on all sides to refrain from actions that are incompatible with the Charter of the United Nations and with international law.

Pakistan views the forthcoming parliamentary elections in Iraq as another important landmark in the march of our Iraqi brothers and sisters towards a democratic and pluralistic Iraqi State that reconciles the interests of all the Iraqi people.

Meanwhile, the situation in Yemen remains a cause for extreme distress. Some 22 million Yemenis are in dire need of immediate humanitarian assistance, which warrants both a surge in diplomacy to realize a political settlement and the provision of generous humanitarian support to the millions in need across the country. We will continue to extend our full support for all diplomatic efforts, including those being made under the auspices of the Secretary-General's Special Envoy Martin Griffiths, to find an inclusive and just political solution in Yemen.

In conclusion, I would like to say that the Middle East is a cradle of civilization, but it has been transformed into a cauldron of conflict. Unless the value of human life and the rights of all peoples are respected and unless the principles of the Charter of the United Nations are upheld in the Middle East and other regions near and far, the Middle East may well be racing towards unprecedented disaster.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Atlassi (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): First, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Council this month and on your initiative to hold this debate today on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. It clearly shows that your country is

committed to continuously supporting the Palestinian question particularly in the current situation. I would also like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, for his valuable briefing on this topic.

Today's meeting is being held under very difficult and delicate conditions. The situation in the Middle East is deteriorating day by day, particularly with regard to the Palestinian question. We must recognize that tensions in the region have dominated international political discourse, at the expense of the Palestinian question. The situation in occupied Palestine is clearly worsening, which could have grave consequences, owing to the continuation of the policies of Judaization, colonization and oppression policies methodically exercised by the Israeli occupation authorities against the Palestinian people. These policies have exacerbated tensions and thwarted the prospects of any action that could help resolve the situation and relaunch the peace process, which has been stalled since 2014, in order to reach a two-State solution and establish the State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the 4 June 1967 borders.

The use of excessive force against unarmed civilians in such a way that causes casualties among them is deplorable and to be condemned. Such actions only exacerbate tensions and perpetuate the cycle of violence. The use of force and violence has never been the key to peace or the peaceful solution that is so sorely desired and needed today. Conditions that are not conducive to a decent life cannot support the peace process. The settlement activities continue in violation of United Nations resolutions, especially resolution 2334 (2016), which only serves to provoke the Palestinians and the international community.

The city of Jerusalem has a privileged status, not only for its inhabitants, but also for the adherents of the three monotheistic religions. Jerusalem is the first Qibla and the third holiest site in Islam for more than 1.5 billion Muslims. The city of Jerusalem has a special legal status, which must not be challenged in any way, pursuant to relevant Security Council resolutions.

The Kingdom of Morocco, whose King, His Majesty Mohammed VI, chairs the Al-Quds Committee, insists on the need to safeguard the historical, legal and political status of Jerusalem. Morocco calls on the United Nations and, in particular, the permanent members of the Security Council, to fully discharge their responsibility to protect that status and ensure that nothing undermines international efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is now necessary for the international community to shoulder its responsibility and encourage the parties to return to the negotiation table and relaunch the peace process based on the two-State solution — a solution that is more at risk now than ever of vanishing and opening the door to chaos, violence and hatred.

At the request of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, Mr. Nasser Bourita, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, visited Palestine on 27 March. He was welcomed by President Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian Minister for Foreign Affairs and other Palestinian leaders. The purpose of the visit was to reaffirm the Kingdom of Morocco's unchanging view in support of the Palestinian people, their leaders and their just cause. Additionally, the visit provided an opportunity to hold consultations on the current delicate situation and rebuff all attempts to rid Jerusalem of its Arab and Islamic identity. The visit also helped to strengthen our bilateral relations and place Morocco's capacities — be they diplomatic or economic — in the service of the Palestinian question. In order to reinforce that cooperation, the Joint Morocco-Palestine Committee will meet soon to forge closer ties between the two countries and to adopt a number of conventions.

In conclusion, the position of my country with regard to the conflict is unchanged and consistent with the Arab Peace Initiative and its principles and terms of reference for peace, namely, for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital, within the 4 June 1967 borders, living side by side with Israel in peace, security and harmony. As in the past, Morocco is ready to effectively commit to all initiatives that seek to advance the peace process and reach a settlement to achieve security and stability in the region.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to Mr. Abdelaziz.

Mr. Abdelaziz (*spoke in Arabic*): To begin with, I would like to express our appreciation to the Special Coordinator, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his comprehensive briefing before the Council today. I would like also to express our condolences to the Government and delegation of Côte d'Ivoire for the sudden death of our dear friend, Ambassador Bernard

Tanoh-Boutchoue, the Permanent Representative of Côte d'Ivoire and its former Ambassador to Cairo.

Today's meeting is held against the backdrop of deplorable regional and international developments that are having a negative impact on international peace and security and, specifically, on peace and security in the Middle East. These developments also threaten the multilateral system embodied by the United Nations, in particular the Security Council, which risks losing its credibility and international legitimacy.

An increasing number of unarmed innocent people in Palestine, Syria, Libya, Somalia and other countries in the Arab world are falling victim to the current environment. Yet the Security Council is unable to play its crucial role in maintaining international peace and security owing to the paralysis in its decision-making mechanisms, particularly the alarming increase in the use or threat of use of the veto in resolutions that aim to put an end to the suffering of Arab people in our countries, or to stop the violations of the legitimate rights of our people, or to conduct an impartial and transparent investigation into such violations with a view to bringing the perpetrators to justice. The use or threat of use of the veto in resolutions that emphasize the principled positions taken by the Council leads to the protection of one party at the expense of other parties. Furthermore, the inability of the Security Council and its mechanisms to provide a clear political framework for restoring peace and stability in the Middle East based on respect for international legitimacy and recognition of the right of all peoples in the region to live, without exception, in peace, security and stability and of their right for their territories not to be subject to competition between the major Powers is clearly exacerbating the crisis.

The Council must refrain from the use of double standards in dealing with various Arab issues, which undermines its credibility, and it is therefore urgent that efforts be made to reform it and enlarge its membership. The Security Council must reaffirm the principle of the two-State solution, which has long been recognized by the international community as a whole as the basis for reaching a just and comprehensive settlement to the Palestinian question, and realizing the right of the Palestinian people to establish their independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital across the 4 June 1967 borders. That requires direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine on final-status issues, foremost among which is that of Jerusalem, under impartial international supervision. This should be done without favouring any party on the account of another party, in keeping with the main parameters of the peace process, which include, inter alia, the Madrid principles and the principle of land for peace; the Arab Peace Initiative; the Quartet road map; and Security Council resolutions, especially resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016).

All of this should be consistent with the comprehensive vision presented by President Mahmoud Abbas to the Security Council on 20 February 2018, which would ensure the establishment of the independent State of Palestine and its becoming a full-fledged, effective member of the United Nations following an international conference to be held in the summer of 2018. That vision was endorsed by the Arab Summit held in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which Arab leaders called the Jerusalem summit. This represents an affirmation of the centrality of this cause of reaching a just and comprehensive settlement, as indicated by the representative of Tunisia in his statement today on behalf of the Group of Arab States, which supports that statement in its entirety.

Until the independent State of Palestine is established, with East Jerusalem as its capital, the League of Arab States stresses that it is urgent to provide protection to the Palestinian people. This is particularly true in the aftermath of the bloodshed that occurred when the Israeli army fired live rounds at unarmed Palestinian protesters who had taken to the streets starting on Earth Day to express peacefully their right to return to the land of which they had been dispossessed. Those events claimed the lives of scores of Palestinians and injured thousands more. We stress the importance of the Security Council responding to the call by the Secretary-General to conduct a transparent and impartial investigation into these events under United Nations supervision, as they represent gross violations of international law, international humanitarian law and human rights law. The aim is to bring the perpetrators to international justice.

The League of Arab States calls on the Council not to be deceived by the false allegations that Palestine uses children as human shields. The Council instead should focus on the situation of Palestinian children in Israeli prisons. The League also stresses the importance of the full and honest implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), which will prevent Israel, the occupying Power, from altering the realities on the ground through

its illegal and expansionist settlement policy. That policy has consistently been condemned by the League given its negative impact on final-status negotiations. This can be achieved only if the Secretary-General provides monthly written reports with maps, images and documents, pursuant to resolution 2334 (2016). In addition to that, there should be an effective response to the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people, including the provision of sufficient funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in order to enable it to discharge its lofty mandate.

In conclusion, the League of Arab States underscores that the continued occupation by Israel of Palestinian territories and Israel's violation of the rights of the unarmed Palestinian people, as well as the settlements built illegally by Israel, all pose serious threats to international and regional peace and security. Hence, on the basis of the provisions contained in Article 23 of the Charter of the United Nations, the 22 States members of the League of Arab States believe that Israel is not qualified to be a candidate for non-permanent membership in the Council for 2019-2020, given that it lacks the main prerequisite needed as stated in that Article, which is to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security and to achieve the lofty goals of the United Nations.

The League of Arab States and its member States call on all peace-loving countries to do the same and to express their rejection of Israel's candidacy, given that it is continuing to occupy territories in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon; to violate the norms of international law, humanitarian and human rights law; and to explicitly disrespect the international legitimacy of Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. Israel openly disrespects the United Nations and its principal organs and Member States — whose goal is to maintain multilateral international legitimacy, the Organization's solid foundation — by falsely accusing them of being biased against it.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Botswana.

Ms. Motsumi (Botswana): Allow me at the outset, Sir, to reiterate my delegation's sincere congratulations to you and your country, Peru, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of April. I wish also to express my delegation's appreciation to you for having convened this quarterly open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, a matter to which my delegation attaches great importance.

I further wish to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, for his invaluable input on the subject.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

It is a fact that the Council has for 70 years now had on its agenda the situation in the Middle East, with particular reference to the question of Palestine. While we regret this reality, Botswana stands firm and will not tire of expressing its position on this matter as long as a durable solution has not been achieved.

We continue to be encouraged by the unrelenting pressure being brought to bear by the international community for the resumption of the intra-Palestine peace talks. We accordingly call for the intensification of efforts to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East that is jointly facilitated by the United Nations, the Middle East Quartet, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Madrid terms of reference, as well as the relevant United Nations resolutions.

While we remain optimistic, we are at the same time deeply concerned about the growing tension between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority. To this end, we deplore unilateral actions, as they lack legitimacy and also have the potential to undermine prospects for peace.

Against the backdrop of challenges relating to the achievement of sustainable peace in the disputed territories, we condemn any activities that undermine international efforts to achieve a lasting solution, including increasing illegal settlements; violence; and the denial of the rights of peaceful protesters. We also deplore the lack of progress on negotiations on final-status issues. In this regard, Botswana supports the plan proposed by President Mahmoud Abbas, which he presented to the Council in February this year (see S/PV.8183). The plan sought to address problems that have consistently undermined efforts to bring about peace in Palestine.

We encourage the parties to respect all relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334

(2016), which is clear in its call for parties to refrain from inflammatory rhetoric or acts of provocation or incitement. It urges them to act in accordance with international law, including humanitarian law, in the interests of promoting peace and security.

I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate my delegation's long-standing position on the question of Palestine. We continue to believe that there is no alternative to the two-State solution. We therefore cannot overemphasize our continued support of a negotiated solution that embraces the coexistence of Israel and Palestine, living peacefully side by side as two sovereign States.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm Botswana's solidarity with the Palestinian people and my country's unwavering support for their just cause. We reiterate our call for the strengthening of the coordination of international efforts to promote a just, lasting, comprehensive and peaceful solution to the situation in the Middle East, in particular the question of Palestine. We also lend our full support to the continued diplomatic efforts of the Security Council and the good offices of the Secretary-General. We thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and all other agencies, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, for their commitment to the peace process, as well as for their relentless efforts aimed at finding a sustainable solution to the political, security and humanitarian situation in the region.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Djani (Indonesia): I would like to begin by thanking you, Mr. President, for convening today's open debate of the Security Council. I also thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his briefing on the most recent developments in the region.

Indonesia associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and the statement to be delivered by my colleague, the representative of Nicaragua.

Only two weeks ago, while addressing the Council, the Secretary-General made the same observation as he did this morning, citing the examples not only of Palestine, but also of other countries in the Middle East (see S/PV.8231). He described the situation as chaotic and stated that it has become a threat to international peace and security. However, as we have always said, what is happening in Palestine is the ongoing failure of the international community to implement the two-State solution. We reiterate our call on the Council to emerge from its very dangerous inertia.

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict has continued for far too long. Current global crises should not divert our attention from the Palestinian issue. It is crucial to put the Palestinian issue back on the international agenda. This year marks the seventieth anniversary of the 1948 war — the Nakba — during which more than 800,000 Palestinians were expelled from their land. It also marks another regrettable milestone: almost three quarters of a century has elapsed and the world still awaits a just, lasting and comprehensive resolution to the conflict.

In the past month, there has been tremendous violence on the Gaza-Israeli border, with protesting and unarmed civilians being gunned down by Israeli forces. As of last Friday, the death toll since the weekly protests began on 30 March stood at nearly 40, with thousands wounded by Israeli shooters. The killing of unarmed civilians violates every known provision of international law and human decency. It must end.

Hundreds of resolutions and communiqués on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict have been adopted, and yet those documents have not been implemented. What is happening in Palestine is the persistent failure of the international community to implement the two-State solution. We therefore reiterate our call on the Council to rouse itself and take action on this very dangerous situation. We must reaffirm and preserve a negotiated two-State solution for peace on the basis of pre-1967 borders, within a clear and defined timetable, in accordance with the internationally recognized terms of reference, including the Arab Peace Initiative. The adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), which stated that Jewish settlement of Palestinian lands has no legal validity and is a flagrant violation of international law, demonstrates some of the progress seen in recent years.

My delegation again calls on States to avoid provocative actions or pronouncements that contradict Security Council and General Assembly resolutions on the status of Jerusalem. We have already seen the implications of such actions and pronouncements. Accordingly, we must create conditions conducive for

the peace process. In the meantime, we must do what we can to help the people of Palestine, including the refugees, for whom the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNWRA) has been essential. That is why the recurring financial shortfall of UNRWA raises deep concerns. We therefore call on the international community to recommit to supporting the work of UNRWA. Indonesia will play its part in this regard. We owe it to ourselves to resolve this ongoing conflict during our lifetime.

We would like to see peace in Yemen and Syria. Many civilians have already lost their lives or been uprooted and become refugees or internally displaced persons. Nothing can justify the targeting of civilians, including the use of chemical weapons or weapons of mass destruction. We reiterate our call for all parties to respect international law and United Nations resolutions and to ensure the safety of civilians.

We share the belief of many that peace in Syria can be achieved only through a lasting and comprehensive solution and not by military means. The solution must also be credible and respect the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria. Moreover, the international community must continue to press for the cessation of hostilities and full, safe and unhindered access for the delivery of humanitarian assistance. The international community must refrain from any unilateral action that might jeopardize prospects for peace.

Our meeting today could not be more timely, following the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on peacebuilding and sustaining peace. We must ensure that peace goes hand in hand with development and human rights. The high-level meeting encourages us to do more to achieve peace in the Middle East. What is needed is greater reconciliation. What we do today will dictate our place in history. Let us stop the nightmare faced by the Palestinians and make their dream of an independent nation a reality.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mrs. Rodríguez Camejo (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): We align ourselves with the statement made by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Cuba has been deeply concerned about the pernicious deterioration of the situation in the Middle East since the last open debate on the topic (see S/PV.8167). We reiterate our firm condemnation of the criminal aggression perpetrated by the Israeli army against the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip on 30 March, which led to the death of dozens of people and left more than 400 injured. This cruel and disproportionate act is a gross and blatant violation of the Charter of the United Nations and of international humanitarian law, heightens tensions in the region and reduces the likelihood of success of efforts aimed at resuming peace talks between Palestinians and Israelis. It is very regrettable that, because of constant obstruction by one of its members, the Security Council has not even been able to condemn the tragic events in the Gaza Strip or enforce respect for international law and international humanitarian law, including the protection of Palestinians, at a time when the urgent action of the international community is needed.

Cuba calls on the Security Council to assume its responsibility under the United Nations Charter with regard to the maintenance of international peace and security and take the necessary decisions and demand that Israel puts an immediate end to the occupation of Palestinian territories and to the aggressive colonial policies and practices, and comply with Council resolutions on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, in particular resolution 2334 (2016).

We express our solidarity with the Government and the people of Palestine. We reiterate our unwavering support for a comprehensive, just, peaceful and lasting solution to the Palestinian question — which lies at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict — that is based on a two-State solution and allows Palestinians to exercise their right to self-determination and to a free and sovereign State, with East Jerusalem as its capital and within the pre-1967 borders, as well as the right of refugees to return. We will also continue to support the admission of Palestine as a full Member of the United Nations.

Furthermore, we join in the international community's firm rejection of the unilateral decision made by the Government of the United States to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, which constitutes a serious and flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and the relevant General Assembly and Security Council

resolutions. That decision, intended to alter the historical status of Jerusalem, can only undermine the legitimate interests of the Palestinian people and the Arab countries.

Cuba also expresses its most emphatic condemnation of the recent attack perpetrated by the United States and some of its allies on 13 April on military and civilian facilities in the Syrian Arab Republic, using as a pretext the alleged use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Government against civilians in Douma, without any proof that the Syrian Government had used such weapons and prior to the investigation by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons Fact-Finding Mission. That unilateral action, which sidestepped the Security Council, and the Israeli attack on a Syrian airbase in the governorate of Homs on 9 April are yet further flagrant violations of the principles of international law and the Charter of the Organization.

Cuba demands the full and unconditional withdrawal of Israel from the Syrian Golan and all occupied Arab territories. We reiterate that any measure or action that has been taken or is to be taken to change the legal, physical or demographic status or the institutional structure of the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as Israel's measures to exercise its jurisdiction and administration on that territory, constitute violations of international law, international agreements, the Charter and resolutions of the United Nations, including resolution 497 (1981), and the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Cuba advocates a constructive and respectful dialogue among the peoples of the region and calls for non-interference in internal affairs and an end to foreign aggression and to support, financing or the supply of weapons to terrorist groups with the goal of promoting instability and conflict in the Middle East. Moreover, Cuba calls for an end to the fabrication of excuses and concepts in the Council that aim to legitimize the unilateral use of force and aggression against sovereign States. Let us uphold multilateralism, strictly based on the purposes and principles of the Charter and international law.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Maldives.

Ms. Zahir (Maldives): The Maldives wishes to begin by emphasizing the importance of this ongoing debate in the Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. Given the constant evolution of the political dynamics and the situation on the ground, this thematic debate provides an important forum to take stock of and assess the pathway to sustainable peace in the Middle East. I wish to thank the briefers at this open debate for their contributions, which have contextualized the present state of affairs.

Peace in the Middle East can never be realized without a viable solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which has destabilized the region for 70 years. Taking note of the report presented to the Council last month by the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (see S/PV.8214), the Maldives condemns in the strongest terms the new wave of violence in the occupied Palestinian territories.

It is evident from the progressive activities on expanding settlements that there is a need to respect the principles of international law and abide by the relevant resolutions of the Security Council. The impunity with which violence is perpetrated and the continued violation of international norms set a dangerous precedent that has far-reaching consequences for the maintenance of peace and security in future.

The Maldives has always been a strong advocate for the resolution of disputes and conflict through peaceful means, by exploring new and innovative solutions for persistent conflicts and finding common ground through mutual dialogue. In that regard, the Maldives welcomes and supports the proposal by President Mahmoud Abbas to the Council in February for an international peace conference aimed at resuming peace talks between Palestine and Israel (see S/PV.8183). We applaud Palestine's leadership and willingness to begin that dialogue, and strongly urge Israel to engage in those talks in good faith. The Maldives also acknowledges the fact that this is a dispute that has many dimensions and impacts many actors in the international community. We therefore encourage all parties and stakeholders concerned to contribute to those negotiations, as appropriate, in the most constructive and conducive manner possible.

In addition to taking assertive political action to resolve the conflict, my delegation also wishes to emphasize the importance of enhancing action on the ground to alleviate the suffering of people. In that regard, we welcome the relief and aid efforts from the United Nations, Member States, intergovernmental

organizations, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. We note with concern the $446 million funding gap for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, and urge Member States to address that issue, taking into account the wide range of support that the Agency provides to the Palestinian people.

The Maldives reiterates its call for a two-State solution recognizing the sovereign and independent State of Palestine, based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. My delegation urges the Security Council to take more concrete action to fulfil its mandate and encourages all Member States to engage in a form of debate that will deliver the end results necessary to establish and maintain sustainable peace in Palestine and the Middle East.

On the question of Syria, we remain concerned. We need to urgently address the humanitarian situation in Syria and protect its citizens from further pain, fear and uncertainty. We remain confident in the ability of the Council to deliver the result that is required in Syria — a lasting ceasefire and sustainable peace. We also remain committed to doing our part, lending our voice and joining the chorus of actors supporting lasting peace in the country.

We need to work together to find meaningful solutions to the many situations of violence and instability in the Middle East. We need to focus on sustaining peace, so that societies ravaged by war and conflict may progress again. State failure has the potential to derail any peace process. We believe that, whether it is through strengthening the capacity of State institutions, the eradication of poverty or addressing other determinants of conflict, such as a lack of access to resources, natural and man-made disasters and climate risk, we need to focus on building the capacity and resilience of States.

The Maldives will continue to stand with the people of the Middle East — a region that is close to our hearts and with which we share many cultural, religious and historical ties. The Maldives will remain committed to working with all our partners on that important and historical issue to find shared solutions, so that the suffering of people in the various conflict zones in the region can be brought to an end through peaceful means. We will work with our partner countries, international organizations and other important actors to bring lasting peace to our shared destiny.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Malta.

Mr. Inguanez (Malta): I wish to thank the delegation of Peru, in its capacity as the President of the Security Council, for convening today's open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. I also wish to join others in thanking the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Mladenov, for his comprehensive briefing.

Malta aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union and would like to add a few elements in its national capacity.

Malta notes with deep concern the recent developments throughout the Middle East, which continue to propagate instability and insecurity in the region and beyond. There is an urgent need for de-escalation, be it between the Israelis and Palestinians or in Syria. We call on all sides to avoid actions that undermine the prospects for peace. In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I reiterate that Malta's position is quintessentially pro-peace. Prospects for a two-State solution are in danger, and it is our firm conviction that the international community is duty-bound to ensure that they be safeguarded.

Lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians can be based only on a two-State solution, including addressing the needs and aspirations of both sides as well as all permanent status issues. Malta reiterates that the status of Jerusalem is a final-status issue, and maintaining international consensus on the issue is of the utmost importance. Malta also opposes further settlement activity, as settlements are illegal under international law and are an obstacle to peace. In addition, Malta condemns all acts of violence by all sides, especially against civilians and minors, and urges an end to incitement and provocations, which serve only to widen the gap between the two sides. Furthermore, the freedom of expression and peaceful assembly should be respected by all.

Intra-Palestinian reconciliation is one of the key elements towards reaching a two-State solution. Therefore, Malta encourages the Palestinians to persevere on that track. We certainly commend Egypt for its mediation role. Intra-Palestinian reconciliation is also an important element to improve the dramatic humanitarian situation in Gaza. In that regard, Malta also advocates an end to the closure of Gaza, while addressing the security concerns of Israel. I take this

opportunity to reiterate Malta's full support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. It is as crucial for Palestinian refugees as it is for the stability of the whole region.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is in dire need of a political horizon and the resumption of dialogue. Confidence needs to be restored and trust rebuilt. That is easier said than done, but forgiveness and restraint — in words and in action — remain crucial as the underlying basis for rebuilding confidence and trust. The international community and multilateralism have an important role to play in establishing a political horizon and in facilitating the resumption of dialogue between the two sides.

I also take this opportunity to underscore the importance that Malta attaches to the resumption of the United Nations-led intra-Syrian talks in Geneva, as emphasized yesterday at the second Brussels conference on supporting the future of Syria and the region. There can be no military solution in Syria. Only a political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) can yield a sustainable solution for Syria and for peace in the region.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Nigeria.

Mr. Itegboje (Nigeria): I thank the delegation of Peru for organizing today's open debate. Our special appreciation goes to the briefers for sharing their insightful perspectives on this very important subject.

Nigeria aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Nigeria notes with grave concern the alarming situation in many parts of the Middle East, particularly in Palestine. In that regard, it is pertinent for all parties to make genuine and concerted efforts to find peaceful solutions and to cooperate closely with the United Nations and its agencies in order to achieve the shared objective of a two-State solution, in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions and international law.

As the international community continues to seek avenues to advance the peaceful resolution of the Palestinian question, international efforts must remain focused on paving the way for Israel and Palestine to return to meaningful negotiations. We therefore wish to highlight the cogency of multilateral diplomacy, and reiterate that there is no substitute to an agreed multilateral approach for addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conundrum in a sustainable manner.

Nigeria believes that achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine is imperative for the attainment of durable peace and stability in the Middle East. It is for that reason that we acknowledge the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 72/240, concerning the status of Jerusalem, on 21 December 2017, and once again call on all parties to respect the relevant United Nations resolutions on the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

We therefore encourage Israel to take concrete measures to freeze all settlement-related activities in occupied Palestinian territory. On their part, Palestinian leaders must also signal their readiness to return to the negotiating table by, inter alia, making enhanced efforts to forge unity and deal with militancy and other internal security challenges. It is beyond doubt that violence and unilateral actions will not resolve the long-drawn-out conflict.

My delegation reaffirms its full support for the rights of the Palestinian people, including the protection of their fundamental human rights, particularly their right to free movement and self-determination, as well as the maintenance of the dignity of the individual Palestinian person and their inalienable right to live without the fear of persecution. In that regard, we restate our belief that the Security Council must not fail in its duty and responsibility to the Palestinian people.

In conclusion, Nigeria calls on States with influence over the parties concerned to encourage them to re-engage in dialogue on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Quartet road map, the Arab Peace Initiative and other existing agreements. We reaffirm our unwavering support for a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine existing side-by-side in peace.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mrs. Rubiales de Chamorro (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I would like to thank our brothers from Peru for their work at the helm of the Security Council during this month.

The past month has again reminded us why, despite the many issues on the Security Council's

agenda, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must remain a priority demanding the Council's attention. At least 37 demonstrators have been killed and over 4,900 wounded due to the excessive and disproportionate use of force by Israel, the occupying Power, particularly in response to the Great March of Return demonstrations at the Gaza Strip border fence with Israel. The Committee urges that the Council join and support the call made by Secretary-General, among others, for an independent and transparent investigation of the incidents. As the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court warned, violence against civilians could constitute crimes under the Rome Statute. Moreover, the continuing violence foreshadows the deterioration of an already unstable and tense situation, with serious repercussions. We also condemn the attack on the convoy of the Palestinian Prime Minister during his 13 March visit to Gaza, which was a hostile and violent act at cross purposes with Palestinian reconciliation. We urge all Palestinian parties to continue working towards unity to peacefully achieve their shared goals and realize the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people.

This coming May, we will commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the 1948 war, which led to the expulsion and flight of almost 800,000 Palestinian Arab inhabitants from their homes in what was then the British Mandate of Palestine. That legacy of expropriation, known as the Nakba — the catastrophe — continues to cast a shadow over the refugees of 1948 and their descendants. The continued lack of a just solution to that tragedy and the current plight of Palestinian refugees have prolonged and exacerbated the conflict, as well as its regional and global impact. In that context, the Committee invites all Member States to participate in its upcoming forum, entitled "Seventy Years after 1948 — Lessons to Achieve a Sustainable Peace", to be held at Headquarters from 17 to 18 May to consider that history, as well as possible joint solutions to promote peace.

The Committee urges donor countries to act quickly in providing broad support for the activities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, especially given the fact that the humanitarian situation in Gaza is seriously worsening and the needs of Palestinian refugees suffering from the consequences of the Syrian crisis are increasing. At this fragile juncture, we must meet our humanitarian obligations vis-à-vis the refugees by providing the Agency with the necessary support so that it can fulfil its mandate and play its stabilizing role in the region.

As was indicated in the fifth report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), introduced by Mr. Mladenov on behalf of the Secretary-General before the Security Council last month (see S/PV.8214), we regret that the Government of Israel decided to move forward settlement plans, which violate its obligations as an occupying Power under international law and are a clear indication of its indifference to the authority of the Security Council. We encourage Member States to follow the examples set by the Danish Parliament and the European Commission, which decided to make the distinction between the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967 in their respective dealings with each, pursuant to resolution 2334 (2016) and in adhering faithfully to the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The unilateral decisions of some States Members to move their embassies from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, in violation of resolution 478 (1980) and other relevant United Nations resolutions, irreversibly slows prospects for peace and puts in jeopardy the viability of the two-State solution within the 1967 borders.

Faced with that prospect, we welcome and support President Mahmoud Abbas' peace initiative presented before the Council on 20 February (see S/PV.8183). Visits by the Committee's delegation to Uganda in February and Panama in early April elicited broad acknowledgement of the outlook and efforts of the State of Palestine, as well as the support for the full exercise of the rights of the Palestinian people. That reflects the international consensus that continues to prevail concerning the just and peaceful resolution of the question of Palestine that must be realized. Our willingness — that of the international community — to act rapidly and unwaveringly remains the best assurance for achieving a peaceful solution to the conflict.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Mayong Onon (Malaysia): At the outset, I wish to thank you, Sir, for convening this important open debate, which allows non-members of the Security Council to express their views on the worrisome situation in the Middle East. We hope that the views expressed here will be considered seriously by the Council members in all their deliberations on the maintenance of peace and security in the region.

Malaysia aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The situation in Palestine remains dire. A peaceful resolution of the longest man-made conflict remains elusive. That is largely due to the continued defiance by Israel — the occupying Power — of various relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016). The excessive use of force by Israel in responding to the Palestinians involved in the peaceful Great March of Return, which Malaysia strongly condemns, is totally uncalled for and unacceptable. We therefore demand that Israel stop all violations and illegal activities and fully comply with all its obligations pursuant to all the relevant resolutions.

It is the responsibility of all Members of the United Nations to contribute to finding a just and peaceful solution to the conflict. It is in that context that Malaysia reiterates its deep concern about the decision taken by the United States to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and to relocate its Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. That decision, which regrettably is being emulated by a number of other States, undermines efforts to finding a comprehensive, just and durable settlement to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It has led to the dismay and frustration of a majority of Member States, the Palestinians and the Muslim world in particular, and those who wish to see peace, stability and security in the region. The decision not only contravenes and undermines the relevant Security Council resolutions, but it would also embolden Israel, as the occupying Power, to continue to execute its brutal occupation and repressive policies in the occupied Palestinian territory — a clear violation of international law, including humanitarian law, while inflicting immense suffering on the Palestinians.

For its part, Malaysia will continue to provide assistance, within its means, to the Palestinians as well as the efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in providing assistance, protection and advocacy for Palestinian refugees. We therefore urge all Member States to strengthen their support for the Agency so as to ensure that the basic needs of Palestinian refugees are met, which include educational access, emergency food assistance and other support, as well as primary health care.

Malaysia sincerely hopes all Members of the United Nations can provide a positive contribution in breaking the impasse in the Middle East peace process, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, as well as international laws and norms. Malaysia continues to believe that a two-State solution, with Palestinians and Israelis living side by side in peace, based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine, is the only viable solution to this long-standing conflict.

Besides the situation in Palestine, Malaysia remains deeply concerned about the continued deteriorating humanitarian situation in Syria. In that regard, Malaysia stands in solidarity with the international community in addressing this issue and urges all parties to the conflict to adhere to their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law. The parties must also fulfil their responsibilities in enabling unfettered humanitarian access to reach those in need, critically sick or wounded.

On numerous occasions, Malaysia has expressed its view that there is no military solution to the conflict in Syria. A political solution is the only way forward, and that hinges on the political will of the parties to the conflict themselves. Prolonging violence will not benefit any party and will only be exploited by terrorist groups and lead to further humanitarian catastrophe.

Malaysia condemns in the strongest possible terms the use of chemical weapons by any parties under any circumstances. The use of such weapons is abhorrent and a flagrant violation of international law, especially the Chemical Weapons Convention. Malaysia also strongly believes that the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) is the sole organization mandated to undertake investigations on the use of chemical weapons. In that regard, Malaysia urges all parties concerned to cooperate with the OPCW to ensure an impartial and thorough investigation of Douma incident.

Malaysia has always believed that, in dealing with matters of peace and security, all parties must act in a manner consistent with the Charter of the United Nations and international law. In that regard, Malaysia believes that no military solution can bring about an end to any conflict in the world, as ultimately only the innocent would suffer. We therefore urge all parties involved to bridge all political divides to find

a political solution through dialogue and negotiations in all conflicts, be it in Palestine, Syria, Yemen or anywhere else in the world. We appeal to all parties to demonstrate restraint and avoid any actions that could escalate conflicts further, which would only worsen the suffering of our fellow human beings.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Viet Nam.

Mrs. Nguyen (Viet Nam): At the outset, I would like to thank the Peruvian presidency for convening this important quarterly open debate under the agenda item entitled "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question". I also wish to thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his informative briefing.

I wish to join others in extending my deepest condolences to the Government and the Permanent Mission of Côte d'Ivoire for the loss of the distinguished and dedicated diplomat, our dear colleague His Excellency Ambassador Bernard Tanoh-Boutchoue. He will be very much missed at the United Nations.

Viet Nam aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Today's meeting represents an urgent appeal by the international community for concerted action to push forward the peace process in the Middle East and address the Palestinian question.

For over half of a century, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has become even more complex and tense as a result of confrontation and unilateral actions. Viet Nam is deeply concerned by the dangerous situation in the region as reported by the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, especially the lack of dialogue between the parties, the continuing expansion of illegal settlements, the killing of innocent people, deadly clashes in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the deterioration of the humanitarian and economic situation in Gaza, growing incitement to violence and the violation of the rights and dignity of the Palestinian people. Those negative developments have imperilled the prospect of the two-State solution, put the security of the whole region at stake and had an adverse impact on world peace. Allow me to highlight the following points.

First, de-escalating tensions on the ground is a prerequisite for any future negotiation and dialogue. We urge all parties concerned to strictly comply with the Charter of the United Nations and international law, exercise maximum self-restraint, refrain from any provocative acts and foster a favourable environment for dialogue and the pursuit of peace.

Secondly, it is clear that foreign occupation is illegal under international law and constitutes an obstacle for peace. We call on Israel to halt and reverse all settlement development, lift its blockade in the Gaza Strip and step up its efforts to protect civilians and improve the living conditions of the Palestinian population.

Thirdly, we stress the need for all parties to respect international human rights law and international humanitarian law, avoid any acts of hostility, incitement or violence and ensure unimpeded access to humanitarian assistance. My delegation reaffirms its unwavering support to the indispensable role and tireless efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to ease the suffering of the Palestinians.

Fourthly, Viet Nam reaffirms its unconditional support for the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people for their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent and sovereign State. We firmly believe that a two-State solution that provides for the establishment of the State of Palestine coexisting in peace, security and mutual recognition with the State of Israel on the basis of the pre-1967 borders is the only path to peace. All solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including with regard to the status of Jerusalem, must be in line with international law and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, in particular resolutions 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016), as well as the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map, and must be agreed upon by all the parties involved. In that regard, my delegation would like to express its appreciation to Bolivia, France, Kuwait and Sweden for hosting an Aria Formula meeting on 22 February on the theme "Prospects for the two-State solution for peace".

In conclusion, Viet Nam supports all efforts and initiatives aimed at seeking a peaceful, just, comprehensive and long-lasting solution to this protracted conflict. In that vein, we welcome President Mahmoud Abbas's proposal and his call for an international peace conference. It is high time now for

the United Nations, especially the Security Council, to play an important role in encouraging the resumption of peace talks between the parties, ending the suffering of the Palestinian people and bringing peace to the region.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Edrees (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am honoured, Mr. President, to deliver my second statement in a week in the Security Council under your presidency: a few days ago I delivered a statement on youth, peace and security (see S/PV.8243), and now I am speaking on the situation in the Middle East. I would like to begin by thanking Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing today and for his ongoing efforts to advance the peace process in the Middle East. I would also like to thank him for his efforts to address the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza and his work for Palestinian reconciliation.

The Middle East continues to face major challenges as a result of the continued occupation of Arab territories, which began in 1967 and has far-reaching consequences for the region and its peoples. The entire world remembers the occupation with every piece of land that is confiscated, every settlement that is approved or built and every Palestinian family that suffers — whether in the West Bank as a result of the separation wall, or in the besieged Gaza Strip.

We must again reiterate that the right of the Palestinian people to establish their independent State based on 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, is an inalienable right under international law. It is an eternal right. The only way to achieve the legitimate Palestinian rights is by addressing the root causes of the problem, namely, the occupation. The peace process must also be revived in accordance with the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions to end the occupation and to realize the two-State solution so that both the Palestinian and Israeli peoples can live in peace and security like other peoples of the world.

The issue of Jerusalem has a special place in the hearts of millions of people around the world. That sensitive issue requires particular attention. However, we acknowledge that international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions are the only international legal basis to achieve these objectives away from historical and religious reasons. Otherwise, there could be grave consequences. Any arbitrary action would have serious repercussions and would render the two-State solution no longer viable.

The appeal to uphold the international resolutions and international law is not extravagant, particularly in a region beset by conflicts and at a time when the world faces serious challenges and does not need further instability. That appeal takes into account threats that could lead to the collapse of the international order and lead sooner or later to the suffering of all peoples of the world.

Guaranteed safety and security is a right of all peoples in the region so that they all, including the Israelis, can live in peace within their borders and in good-neighbourly relations with other nations of the region. However, Member States may also agree that equality and the rights of people are the basis for justice and stability. We cannot believe that peace, security and well-being can prevail in the region while the Palestinian people suffer under decades-long occupation.

As part of the appeal for peaceful coexistence by President Fattah Al Sisi on a number of occasions, we therefore urge both parties — the Palestinian and the Israeli — to recognize the truth that both peoples will continue to exist as neighbours on this land. The choice is either to find a way to coexist on the basis of equal rights and duties or to give in to rhetoric and hardline positions. That may ultimately serve the interests of some and strengthen their position. However, it will negatively affect both peoples for many years and have grave consequences as a result of incitement and hatred.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Iceland.

Mr. Gunnarsson (Iceland): Allow me first to thank the presidency of Peru for having convened this quarterly meeting on the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I would also like to thank Mr. Mladenov for his comprehensive and thoughtful briefing this morning.

Allow me also to join other speakers in expressing my condolences to the people and the Government of Côte d'Ivoire for the untimely passing of our colleague, Ambassador Bernard Tanoh-Boutchoue.

Syria and Yemen cast a dark shadow over the Middle East region and over the United Nations, particularly the Security Council. Speaking about the eight years of war in Syria, the Secretary-General referred to the systematic violations of international humanitarian

law and international human rights law and the utter disregard for the letter and spirit of the Charter of the United Nations.

The use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Government is well documented and constitutes one of the most serious violations of international law. The latest shocking reports from Douma have yet to be fully investigated. However, the Syrian Government has already demonstrated the will and the ability to use such cruel and illegal weapons against civilian populations. We urge the Security Council to find unity on the issue, not only for the sake of the Syrians but also in order to preserve the international non-proliferation regime.

The General Assembly again finds itself in a position where it needs to look for alternatives to action by the Security Council. The Council is not fulfilling its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Iceland applauds the commitments made in Brussels earlier this week to alleviate the dire humanitarian situation in Syria and in its neighbours. Iceland has increased its funding through a multi-year contribution. It will have contributed nearly $9 million over the period from 2017 to 2020.

The parties to the conflict, in particular the Syrian Government and its backers, must show a real commitment to negotiating an inclusive political settlement. The Secretary-General has said that peace is a moral and political imperative for the Syrian people and for the world.

What the Secretary-General has called a stupid war continues to devastate the lives of millions of Yemenis. We welcome the appointment of Mr. Martin Griffiths as the Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Yemen. His clear analysis offers some hope for progress on finding a political solution. However, the search for a political settlement must be inclusive, including of women, and outside actors must not sabotage talks in the mistaken hope of achieving a military advantage.

On the Israel-Palestine question, there is a clear objective — the two-State solution, under which both Israel and Palestine will live side by side in peace. Yet there are actions and inaction on both sides that make the two-State solution increasingly fragile.

The Israeli settlement policy continues to undermine the possibility of the two-State solution and Gaza remains a powder keg. If that situation is to be defused, Israel must end the isolation of Gaza and adopt proportionate measures in the face of civil unrest. There must also be an end to provocative acts by Palestinians in Gaza.

Finally, a peace process needs to be put on track. There needs to be a viable peace track.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Marzooq (Iraq): I have the pleasure to deliver my statement on behalf of the States members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). I extend my sincere congratulations to Peru and wish it every success as President of the Security Council for this month.

Before delivering our statement, I would like to express the sincere condolences of the OIC member States for the tragic demise of Ambassador Bernard Tanoh-Boutchoue, Permanent Representative of Côte d'Ivoire and Chair of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers.

Our debate today coincides with the worsening situation and rising tensions in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Less than four weeks since the start of the Great March of Return by the Palestinian people, at least 41 Palestinians have been killed and more than 4,000 injured by the Israeli occupying forces, who have used live ammunition and other weaponry against unarmed, defenceless civilians taking part in peaceful demonstrations in demand of their rights and in protest against the cruelty of the displacement, dispossession, occupation and blockade that they have endured for decades. On the eve of the seventeenth anniversary of the Nakba of the Palestinian people, these protests have highlighted the vast consequences and tragedy of this ongoing grave injustice, as well as the urgency of the efforts to reach a solution in the immediate interest of saving human lives and the prospect for bringing about a future of justice, peace and security.

We strongly condemn the brutal Israeli assault of Palestinian protesters and urge this esteemed organ to take responsibility and promote action to stop the deliberate killing and wounding of Palestinian civilians, particularly these days in the occupied and besieged Gaza Strip; to ensure independent and transparent investigations, as called for by the Secretary-General; and to pressure Israel, the occupying Power, to comply

with its obligations under international humanitarian law and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

Moreover, the OIC reiterates its call for lifting the inhuman and illegal Israeli blockade; ensuring the free movement of people, materials and goods; and providing urgently needed humanitarian and economic assistance to the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip, in implementation of resolution 1860 (2009). Serious efforts in that regard are necessary for averting the further deterioration of this dire situation and averting a human catastrophe.

The ongoing abuses and atrocities we are witnessing in the Gaza Strip are taking place against the backdrop of continued hostile, repressive and provocative Israeli practices in the rest of occupied Palestine, including with regard to the situation in occupied east Jerusalem and at the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque. Deliberately unlawful and racist legislation being imposed by the Israeli occupation Government — in violation of international law, conventions and United Nations resolutions — is inflaming the situation and causing even more Palestinian suffering. The OIC warns once again that such illegal Israeli actions threaten to further aggravate the cycle of violence, exacerbate tensions, hatred and radicalism, and stoke religious dimensions to the conflict.

Therefore, we reiterate our appeal to the Security Council to take action to effectively address this security situation. In that regard, we condemn Israel's continuing settlement and colonization of occupied Palestinian territory, including east Jerusalem, in contempt of Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), and the relevant provisions of international law. This illegal settlement policy, entrenching Israel's decades-long military occupation of Palestinian land, remains a core challenge to the will of the international community and the major obstacle to peace. It is a litmus test for the collective international resolve and particularly the Council, which is entitled to take concrete actions to ensure respect for and compliance with its resolutions and prevent unilateral acts by Israel — the occupying Power — that would seriously undermine the vision of the two-State solution, to which we are committed and have repeatedly advocated as a peaceful solution to this conflict.

Millions of Palestinians have been waiting for more than seven decades for the universal values of justice, freedom and peace to prevail in their homeland, Palestine, just as they have waited for their inalienable rights and legitimate aspirations to statehood, independence and recognition to be fulfilled, in implementation of standing United Nations resolutions. Today the OIC once again calls for their fulfilment as a matter of obligation and responsibility by the international community and as a matter of principle and rights.

The status quo of political stalemate, along with ongoing Israeli settlement policies are definitely neither acceptable nor viable. In that regard, the OIC welcomes and supports the peace plan presented to the Council by President of the State of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas, on 20 February (see S/PV.8183). The OIC remains firm in its conviction that the Security Council must act to enhance prospects for peace, hope and justice in order to maintain the viability of the two-State solution, based on 1967 borders, through immediate engagement along with international actors, by launching and sponsoring a multilateral political process to resolve all final status issues on the basis of the long-standing terms of reference and parameters enshrined in the United Nations resolutions, within a specific time frame.

The ongoing plight of millions of Palestinian refugees reflects the cruel reality of a lack of justice. While we praise the role and endeavours of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in that regard, the continued need for its services bears witness to the dire situation being endured by Palestinian refugees across the region and embodies the political commitment to their right to return. The OIC, on this occasion, calls upon the international community to make sure that the plight and growing needs of the Palestinian people are receiving adequate attention, including the necessary funding to UNRWA, and to assume their historical, political, legal and humanitarian responsibilities towards finding a just and durable solution to the question of Palestinian refugees, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

In conclusion, I wish to reaffirm the full support of OIC countries for and solidarity with the Palestinian people and their endeavour to regain their legitimate and inalienable national rights, including the right of return, self-determination and the independence of their State on their national soil, with east Jerusalem as its capital.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Ms. Bahous (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank Peru and you, Mr. President, for ably presiding over the Security Council this month. I also thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his briefing this morning.

The Middle East is currently experiencing a most difficult and complicated phase. At the same time, it is most urgent to make joint efforts to confront the grave challenges and conflicts before us. The whirlwind of conflict and the political and security developments of these crises are pushing the region towards further violence and instability. They are rising to dangerous levels that threaten regional security as well as international peace and security. Unfortunately, the division within the Security Council and its inability to shoulder its responsibilities to bolster security and stability in the Middle East will further exacerbate current conflicts and undermine prospects for their political and diplomatic settlement.

Despite the success achieved in confronting terrorist groups and undermining their capacities, their total elimination will require further joint action in the framework of a common vision and methodology. We always underscore that peace and stability in the region hinge on a just settlement of the Palestinian question, whose centrality we have always reiterated. We call on the international community to give priority to reaching a comprehensive solution in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy. Temporary or piecemeal solutions are no longer sufficient or acceptable if we wish the Middle East to live in sustainable security and stability.

The Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories has caused indescribable suffering for the Palestinian people, who have suffered from systematic violations and been denied their legitimate rights for decades. The occupation fuels violence and hatred and will undermine the remaining prospects for peace. A just, comprehensive and lasting peace will be achieved only when Israel fully withdraws from all the territories occupied since 1967 and an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, has been established, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative. These are absolute prerequisites, as they can help to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The international consensus on ending the conflict on the basis of the two-State solution is a reaffirmation of the fact that these are prerequisites for a true peace. Peace is a strategic Arab choice that we reiterated time and again during our chairmanship of the Arab summit last year, and was also reaffirmed at the most recent Arab summit, the Jerusalem summit, held in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. We will continue, along with our brethren in the State of Palestine and in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which holds the chairmanship of the current summit, to make every effort to achieve peace and support all efforts and international initiatives aimed at saving the two-State solution, as well as to support our steadfast Palestinian brethren so that they can enjoy the right to freedom and statehood.

We stress the importance of implementing the resolutions of the Security Council, especially resolution 2334 (2016). Their non-implementation would encourage the occupying Power to continue with its illegal settlement activities and to avoid shouldering its obligations in terms of achieving peace in accordance with international law. Jordan strongly condemns the illegitimate and illegal attacks by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories, especially its repeated violations against the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Al-Haram Al-Sharif. These provocations are carried out in total disregard for the sentiments of Muslims. International law and the relevant United Nations resolutions have reaffirmed the legal status of East Jerusalem as an occupied territory and rejected any Israeli measures aimed at changing its status in any way.

Jerusalem is the key to peace in the region. We reaffirm its importance for the three monotheistic religions and the enduring right of Palestinians, Arabs, Muslims and Christians to the city. We will pursue our efforts to preserve the historical and legal status of the holy sites in East Jerusalem, based on the historical custodianship of the Hashemite Kingdom over them. This is a historical responsibility that his Majesty King Abdullah II is honoured to hold.

We also condemn the unjustified violence carried out by the occupying Power against unarmed Palestinians, mostly women and children, in the Gaza Strip recently, in blatant violation of international law and international humanitarian law, as well as the relevant United Nations resolutions. The Palestinians have the right to demonstrate peacefully, and we stress the Secretary-General's call for an independent and

transparent investigation to be carried out into the recent events in Gaza.

Peace cannot be achieved through violence, persecution and oppression. This will only exacerbate extremism and terrorism in the region and undermine the prospects for peace and a return to negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis. Turning a blind eye to these illegal practices by Israel and its use of excessive force against civilians would only encourage the occupying Power to continue to carry out more oppressive practices against the Palestinian people, who must be protected against such practices.

Jordan supports the request made by the State of Palestine to seek full membership status at the United Nations based on the Palestinian people's right to a State with a status equal to that of other States Members of the Organization. We urge the international community to shoulder its full responsibilities to provide the necessary care to Palestinian refugees and the necessary political and financial support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), so as to enable it to continue to provide humanitarian and social services until a just solution is reached on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Jordan appreciates the generous financial contributions made by a number of countries at the Rome conference and the Arab League summit held in Al-Dhahran. However, the financial situation of UNRWA is still of concern to us all. The continued deficit in its budget will have serious repercussions for the humanitarian situation and the services provided to more than 5 million Palestinian refugees if we do not address the situation in the coming months.

Concerning the Syrian crisis, we reiterate that the conflict can be resolved only through a political solution, pursuant to the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015) and on the basis of the principles of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, in a way that meets the aspirations of the Syrian people. Jordan has supported regional and international initiatives such as the Astana, Vienna and Sochi talks in the framework of operationalizing the Geneva track under the auspices of the United Nations and not as an alternative to that track. De-escalation agreements are an excellent opportunity to end the fighting and to strengthen security in Syria. We stress that the ongoing violence will move us further away from a political solution and pave the way for a new wave of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. This would also undermine humanitarian efforts to deliver assistance to civilians and IDPs in besieged and hard-to-reach Syrian areas.

The ongoing fighting will also serve terrorist groups and pave the way for such groups to strengthen their abilities following the successful efforts made to undermine their capacities and presence in Syria, Iraq and the region, which would definitely have dangerous repercussions for international and regional relations. We congratulate Iraq on its victories and stress our support as it complements its political process with the participation of all segments of the Iraqi population.

Jordan strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons by any party and stresses the need to carry out an independent international investigation into the use of such weapons. The perpetrators must be held accountable. Resort to such weapons will not serve the cause of achieving a peaceful resolution of the Syrian crisis but will only exacerbate the conflict and threaten the international non-proliferation regime.

In conclusion, the current deterioration of the crises in the region requires the international community to take a series of steps and actions to create a political environment that is conducive to achieving peace in the region and not based on confessionalism, racial discrimination or inequality. What is needed is a just peace that meets the aspirations of the peoples of the region, especially young people who yearn for security and stability and represent the largest segment of our societies.

It is our duty to provide an environment that enables the current generation to contribute to building and prosperity of the Middle East and not resort to violent extremism and terrorism. We have only one option, namely to take decisive and urgent measures to rebuild trust and overcome differences. Let us give a serious chance to just, comprehensive and lasting peace and intensify our joint diplomatic efforts in that direction.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Bahrain.

Mr. Alrowaiei (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank you, Sir, for convening today's important meeting at a time when several developments and challenges are increasing in our region. It is an opportunity to hear the various views on the most complex and sensitive

issues with regard to the Middle East. Furthermore, we thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his valuable briefing.

Today more than ever, we see just how important it is for the international community to play a greater role in ensuring the implementation of its resolutions aimed at achieving peace and security in the Middle East and create conditions conducive to providing every opportunity for the success of the political solutions. That includes protection of the people affected, an end to interference in the internal affairs of countries, and assistance to countries in safeguarding their own sovereignty, security and independence. In that regard, we deplore the situation in Gaza and the escalation in the recent protests, which have claimed many victims.

The Kingdom of Bahrain reiterates its firm position in support of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. It underscores that a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region will be achieved only through a two-State solution, Israel's full withdrawal from all Arab territories that were occupied on 4 June 1967, the return of all Palestinian refugees to the lands from which they were expelled, and the creation of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. This should be based on the relevant international legitimacy resolutions, terms of reference related to the Arab peace process and the Arab Peace Initiative.

We emphasize that East Jerusalem is part and parcel of the territories occupied in 1967 and that it is among those issues related to the final status. It can be resolved only through negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis, based on international law and the two-State solution. We demand that Israel stops taking unilateral actions to change the status of Jerusalem because they are contrary to international resolutions and hamper the efforts to achieve peace and stability in the region.

The Kingdom of Bahrain is committed to playing its full role in the Arab coalition to support legitimacy in Yemen and allow the legitimate Yemeni Government, led by President Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi, to perform all its duties, namely establishing security and confront the coup militias that threaten security and stability, sow sectarian strife and spread terrorism. Furthermore, we support a peaceful solution based on terms of reference agreed upon, such as the Gulf Cooperation Council initiative and its implementation mechanism, in addition to the outcome of the National Dialogue Conference and resolution 2216 (2015). We note the diplomatic efforts of the United Nations, through the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, Mr. Martin Griffiths.

The Kingdom of Bahrain condemns the fact that Iran-backed coup militias in Yemen continue to launch ballistic missiles against Saudi Arabia, a brotherly country. We stand by Saudi Arabia and completely support its measures to defend its territories and safeguard its security and stability.

The suffering of the Syrian people continues to worsen day after day, despite all efforts to find a comprehensive, consensus-based political solution. The international community must take speedy action to find a solution that is acceptable to the Syrian people, based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015). This would preserve the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria and prevent interference in its internal affairs, as well as ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people and restore security and stability in order to rise again with the participation of its entire people.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of Bahrain will pursue its actions and efforts, together with the international community, to resolve conflicts using peaceful means and to achieve security and stability in the region and throughout the world.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Islam (Bangladesh): We thank the Peruvian presidency for convening today's open debate. We convey our delegation's deepest condolences following the sad demise of the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Côte d'Ivoire.

We thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process for his informative briefing.

Bangladesh aligns itself with the statements made by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, and by the representative of Iraq on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

In our national capacity, our delegation would like to make five key points.

First, we reaffirm our support for the peace plan presented by the President of the State of Palestine to

the Council on 20 February (see S/PV.8183). The plan is yet another constructive proposal on behalf of the Palestinian people in their just struggle over seven decades for their inalienable right to self-determination and independence. We urge all concerned to give due consideration to the peace plan, as the status quo on the Palestinian question is neither acceptable nor tenable in the framework of the two-State solution.

Secondly, the Government and people of Bangladesh share grave concerns about the prevailing situation and tension in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. We condemn the killing of at least 41 Palestinians during peaceful demonstrations since the commencement of the Great March of Return nearly four weeks ago. We urge the Council to send a firm and unequivocal message against the unlawful killing and injury of innocent Palestinian civilians. We join the Secretary-General in calling for an independent and transparent investigation into those incidents, and for Israel, the occupying Power, to comply with its obligations under international humanitarian law and relevant United Nations resolutions.

Thirdly, we continue to insist on lifting the illegal Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip, which has created a dire humanitarian situation. Provocative policies and legal measures concerning the occupied East Jerusalem and the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque must be reversed in deference to relevant United Nations resolutions and international public opinion. We reaffirm the overriding importance of preserving the question of East Jerusalem as a final-status issue in the peace process.

Fourthly, Bangladesh urges the Council to prevail upon Israel to immediately halt its illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. We remain concerned about the total disregard to comply with the provisions of resolution 2234 (2016). Immediate priority must be given to ensuring international protection for the Palestinian people suffering for decades from the occupying Power's policy of collective punishment.

Fifthly, we reiterate our concern about the prolonged uncertain situation endured by millions of Palestinian refugees in a number of host countries. We reaffirm the need to ensure enhanced, predictable and sustainable funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNWRA). We call upon Member States in a position to do so to enable UNRWA to discharge its mandate in a meaningful manner.

Bangladesh emphasizes that provocations, unilateral actions and the escalation of tension are totally incompatible with our shared pursuit of peace and security in the Middle East. We expect the Council to demonstrate unity of purpose in order to find peaceful, just and lasting solutions to all protracted conflicts and humanitarian situations in the region, including the Palestinian question.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to make a further statement.

Mr. Safaei (Islamic Republic of Iran): Today we have heard some Iranophobic and hysterical statements from a few delegations. We have been hearing such statements recently from those who are badly in need of an imaginary enemy to whom to sell their beautiful weapons and from those who have entrenched their illegal occupations and aggressions by using such weapons. It is indeed a dirty business and has nothing to do with peace and security in the Middle East. No political theatre — such as we saw this morning inside and outside this Chamber and repeatedly from the representative of the Israeli regime — can cover up the aggressive and expansionist policies of that regime or its behaviour towards its neighbour, which constitute the main threat to peace and security in the region.

Iran's advisory presence in Syria is at the request of the Syrian Government and is legitimate in providing assistance to the Syrian Government to fight and ultimately eliminate all terrorist groups, especially Da'esh, and other individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated with them. It also seeks to restore the unity of that country and achieve a political solution.

We categorically reject the Israeli allegations as baseless and sheer fabrication. It is indeed ironic that the Israeli regime — famous for its atrocities, apartheid policies, war crimes that are well-documented in different United Nations organs and agencies, non-compliance with many United Nations resolutions and occupation of lands of other people for many decades — can allow itself to accuse others in such a sinister way. It is also preposterous that the same region, with its highly known record of developing, producing and stockpiling different kinds of inhumane weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, should venture to falsely accuse others of trying to acquire similar weapons.

We believe that this open debate should be devoted to Palestine. That is why my delegation asked to use this second opportunity to react to the false accusations also made by the representative of Saudi Arabia. The baseless Saudi allegations against Iran and its provocative and destabilizing behaviour in the region aim to distract the international community away from its own widespread systematic crimes, including its support for Wahhabi takfiri ideology, which is the source of many terrorist activities and originates in Saudi Arabia.

The situation in Yemen is another example of the Saudi Arabia's war of aggression being the underlying reason for the escalation of the crisis. There have been various attempts by the aggressors, as well as their accomplices in the war, to cover up their shameful war crimes by introducing false charges against others. The United States is pursuing its lucrative arm business in Yemen, while those responsible for creating the worst humanitarian crisis in the world are showcasing how they hand over their checks to help the victims of their own atrocities. The Saudi-led coalition's measures and indiscriminate aerial attacks have resulted in mass casualties, including among women and children, displaced millions, and amplified poverty and hunger in an already poor country and a surge in epidemic diseases. Such ambitious and expansionist policy measures, as well as the inhumane blockade and use of the threat of starvation as an instrument of war, are tantamount to war crimes or crimes against humanity that should be carefully investigated and duly prosecuted.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel to make a further statement.

Ms. Meitzad (Israel): I have asked for the floor in order to comment on some of the remarks made here earlier today.

In his statement earlier today, the observer of the Observer State of Palestine insisted that the Palestinian demonstrations were entirely peaceful and that all reports to the contrary are "Israeli propaganda". Either we believe that planting and detonating explosive devices, throwing Molotov cocktails and attempting to breach the fence are forms of peaceful protest, or the representative is deliberately choosing to ignore the facts also presented earlier today by the Special Coordinator in his briefing.

As for Bolivia, as predicted, its representative has once again delivered a statement to the Council that is simply incorrect. As I pointed out in the last open debate on the Middle East (S/PV.8167), although Bolivia has sat on the Security Council since January 2017, not once has its representative even approached us to discuss the conflict. It is now April 2018, and still there is no contact.

As for the statement that was made here earlier today by the Ambassador of Lebanon, while Hizbullah, the internationally recognized terrorist organization, plays an open, active and prominent role in the Lebanese Government. The result is the deployment of over 100,000 rockets on our northern border as Hizbullah's fanatical bloodlust draws conflict ever nearer. Meanwhile, Lebanon, which presumed to lecture Israel about human rights, continues to perpetrate official and systematic discrimination against Lebanese people of Palestinian origin, preventing them from gaining access to health care, education, social services and opportunities for employment. There is, sadly, a new meaning of the phrase "cedars of Lebanon" — the irresponsible Lebanese officials who are ceding control to Hizbullah and Iran, and seeding the ground for future conflict.

Moving from Hizbullah to its master, Iran, the Islamic Republic of Iran is the world's leading State sponsor of terror. All present in the Chamber are well aware that Iranian-made and Iranian-supplied weapons are fuelling conflicts and promoting terror in Syria, Lebanon and, as the most recent Panel of Experts has reported, Yemen. Iran's activities violate multiple resolutions and, as Iranian officials regularly tell the world, they dream of the day when they will be able to destroy Israel. We have repeatedly provided the Council with evidence of Iran's malicious and dangerous activities throughout the region, especially in Syria. It is a moral obligation of the international community to take concrete actions against those who insist on fuelling violence, promoting terror and doing their utmost to undermine global peace and security.

The meeting rose at 4.50 p.m.